



gigantic kangaroo was standing close to me."

STEPHEN SCUDAMORE

THE YOUNGER;

OR,

THE FIFTEEN-YEAR



BY

~~ARTHUR~~ LOCKER.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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My Father and Mother—Nancy's Superstition concerning a Drop of Water—The Blackberry Excursion to Halket Wood—The Tall Young Gipsy—His Roguery—He is outwitted by Bruno the Pony—We are lost in the Wood—The Poachers—We are taken Prisoners, and locked up in a Barn—A Pair of Fiery Eyes—Our Escape—Sir Jocelyn Trafford—His Hospitality—My Father advertises for us—Bruno comes Home with a Companion.

IF you had seen my father seated in his study, surrounded by piles of manuscripts and heaps of books, with my mother by his side, patiently copying the extracts which he read aloud to her, you would have said that you never saw a more studious couple. He was by profession an author, but not the sort of author that boys care about. Except on one occasion, which I will mention hereafter, he never wrote any exciting stories about shipwrecks, and battles, and haunted castles, and pirates' lairs, and bandits' caverns. His compositions appeared to me very dull and dry, for they were all about old coins, and old buildings, and old bones. We passed rather a retired life. Although we did not live far from London, my father seldom went to town, except for the sake of consulting

some rare volume at the British Museum, and his chief relaxation consisted in striding swiftly up, and down the gravel-walk under the apple-trees, or in wet weather up and down the long passage which led from the kitchen to the parlour, puffing clouds of smoke from a German pipe. As for my mother, with all the cares of the household on her shoulders (for beyond his books my father was as simple as a baby), she had little time to stir abroad.

My father, although a man of great learning, was too modest and retiring to make much money by his pen; still we managed to pass a happy, contented existence. We lived on very plain food; we did not taste meat above thrice in the week, and we drank nothing but milk-and-water, for my father declared that most of our diseases arise from high feeding and stimulating liquors. The money thus saved from our dinners was spent in keeping a pony; and as this pony, although only thirteen hands high, indulged in every trick of which that noble animal the horse is capable—being addicted, as the humour took him, to rearing, jibbing, bucking, and shying—my sister Lucy and I decided that, when we had achieved the feat of riding Master Bruno barebacked, we had mastered the whole art of horsemanship.

My parents had not always been so stay-at-home as they were when I first made their acquaintance. My father was bred as a surgeon, and had in that capacity made several voyages to America and the East Indies. My mother was the daughter of an Indian officer, and had in her youth been shifted about from station to station. At Bombay my father fell in love with her, and as the major would not allow his daughter to marry a poor ship's surgeon, the poor ship's surgeon married her without asking the major's leave, and carried her off on board ship. I have since

heard my uncle declare that my father had very little voice in the matter, and that it was my mother who ran away with him.

All these exciting adventures happened long before my time, and when I first knew my father he was a hard-toiling author, who looked too quiet to run away with anybody.

When I think of the superstitious tales our maid Nancy used to tell me about drowning, I wonder how I could have been so eager as I was in those days to become a sailor. Here is one of her stories. Her brother was sitting one day on a gate, kicking his heels and thinking of nothing. Overhead was a bright blue sky, without a cloud in it. Suddenly he felt a drop of water fall on his forehead. From that moment he knew that he was doomed to be drowned. He was a sailor by trade, but his parents entreated him to give up going to sea. He did so, but with much unwillingness, for he had just been appointed second mate. A year afterwards, in trying to get a child's toy-boat out of a horsepond, he overbalanced himself, fell in, and was drowned. Another man whom Nancy knew, to whom this same fatal token had happened, determined that he would never go near any piece of water big enough to drown him: he would not even cross a bridge. Nevertheless, said Nancy, triumphantly, Fate was too strong for him. He was seized with a fit while washing his hands, and was found drowned with his face in the basin of water.

You may fancy, then, how frightened I was when, one brilliant sun-shiny day, as I was sitting under a hedge at the bottom of the garden, several drops of water fell on my forehead. I could not be mistaken, so I ran into the kitchen, and told Nancy. She, good-natured girl, folded me in her arms, and began to shed tears. Soon after I

others put their heads between their knees in the endeavor to draw their riders over their withers; Wild Geranium reared straight upright, fidgeted all over with longing to be off, paged with the prettiest, wickedest grace in the world, and would have given the world to neigh if she had dared, but she knew it would be very bad style, so like an aristocrat as she was, restrained herself; Bay Regent almost sawed Jimmy Delmar's arms off, looking like a Titan Bucephalus; while Forest King, with his nostrils dilated till the scarlet tinge on them glowed in the sun, his muscles quivering with excitement as intense as the little Irish mare's, and all his Eastern and English blood on fire for the fray, stood steady as a statue for all that, under the curb of a hand light as a woman's, but firm as iron to control, and used to guide him by the slightest touch.

All eyes were on that throng of the first mounts in the Service; brilliant glances by the hundred gleamed behind hot-house bouquets of their chosen color, eager ones by the thousand stared thirstily from the crowded course, the roar of the Ring subsided for a second, a breathless attention and suspense succeeded it; the Guardsmen sat on their drags, or lounged near the ladies with their race-glasses ready, and their habitual expression of gentle and resigned weariness in nowise altered, because the Household, all in all, had from sixty to seventy thousand on the event, and the Seraph murmured mournfully to his cheroot, "that chestnut's no end fit," strong as his faith was in the champion of the Brigades.

A moment's good start was enough—the flag dropped—off they went sweeping out for the first second like a line of Cavalry about to charge.

Another moment, and they were scattered over the first field, Forest King, Wild Geranium, and Bay Regent leading for two lengths, when Montacute, with his habitual "fast burst," sent Pas de Charge past them like lightning. The Irish mare gave a rush and got alongside of him; the King would have done the same, but Cecil checked him and kept him in that cool swinging center which covered the grassland so lightly; Bay Regent's vast thundering stride was Olympian, but Jimmy Delmar saw his worst foe in the "Guards' crack," and waited on him warily, riding superbly himself.

The first fence disposed of half the field, they crossed the second in the same order, Wild Geranium racing neck to neck

with Pas de Charge; the King was all athirst to join the duello, but his owner kept him gently back, saving his pace and lifting him over the jumps as easily as a lapwing. The second fence proved a cropper to several, some awkward falls took place over it, and tailing commenced; after the third field, which was heavy plow, all knocked off but eight, and the real struggle began in sharp earnest: a good dozen who had shown a splendid stride over the grass being done up by the terrible work on the clods.

The five favorites had it all to themselves; Day Star pounding onward at tremendous speed, Pas de Charge giving slight symptoms of distress owing to the madness of his first burst, the Irish mare literally flying ahead of him, Forest King and the chestnut waiting on one another.

In the Grand Stand the Scraph's eyes strained after the Scarlet and White, and he muttered in his moustaches, "Ye Gods, what's up! The world's coming to an end!—Beauty's turned cautious!"

Cautious, indeed,—with that giant of Pytchley fame running neck to neck by him; cautious,—with two-thirds of the course unrun, and all the yawners yet to come; cautious,—with the blood of Forest King lashing to boiling heat, and the wondrous greyhound stride stretching out faster and faster beneath him, ready at a touch to break away and take the lead: but he would be reckless enough by-and-by; reckless, as his nature was, under the indolent serenity of habit.

Two more fences came, laced high and stiff with the Shire thorn, and with scarce twenty feet between them, the heavy plowed land leading to them, clotted, and black, and hard, with the fresh earthy scent steaming up as the hoofs struck the clods with a dull thunder:—Pas de Charge rose to the first: distressed too early, his hind feet caught in the thorn, and he came down rolling clear of his rider; Montacute picked him up with true science, but the day was lost to the Heavy Cavalry men. Forest King went in and out over both like a bird and led for the first time; the chestnut was not to be beat at fencing and ran even with him; Wild Geranium flew still as fleet as a deer, true to her sex she would not bear rivalry; but little Grafton, though he rode like a professional, was but a young one, and went too wildly, her spirit wanted cooler curb.

And now only, Cecil loosened the King to his full will

and his full speed. Now only, the beautiful Arab head was stretched like a racer's in the run-in for the Derby, and the grand stride swept out till the hoofs seemed never to touch the dark earth they skimmed over; neither whip nor spur was needed, Bertie had only to leave the gallant temper and the generous fire that were roused in their might, to go their way, and hold their own. His hands were low; his head a little back; his face very calm, the eyes only had a daring, eager, resolute will lighting in them; Brixworth lay before him. He knew well what Forest King could do; but he did not know how great the chestnut Regent's powers might be.

The water gleamed before them, brown and swollen, and deepened with the meltings of winter snows a month before the brook that has brought so many to grief over its famous banks, since cavaliers leapt it with their falcon on their wrist, or the mellow note of the horn rang over the woods in the hunting days of Stuart reigns. They knew it well, that long dark line, skimming there in the sunlight, the test that all must pass who go in for the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon. Forest King scented water, and went on with his ears pointed, and his greyhound stride lengthening, quickening, gathering up all its force and its impetus for the leap that was before—then like the rise and the swoop of a heron he spanned the water, and, landing clear, launched forward with the lunge of a spear darted through air. Brixworth was passed—the Scarlet and White, a mere gleam of bright color, a mere speck in the landscape, to the breathless crowds in the stand, sped on over the brown and level grassland; two and a quarter miles done in four minutes and twenty seconds. Bay Regent was scarcely behind him; the chestnut abhorred the water, but a finer trained hunter was never sent over the Shires, and Jimmy Delmar rode like Grimshaw himself. The giant took the leap in magnificent style, and thundered on neck and neck with the "Guards' crack." The Irish mare followed, and with miraculous gameness, landed safely; but her hind legs slipped on the bank, a moment was lost, and "Baby" Grafton scarce knew enough to recover it, though he scoured on nothing daunted.

Pas de Charge, much behind, refused the yawner, his strength was not more than his courage, but both had been strained too severely at first. Montacute struck the spurs into him with a savage blow over the head; the madness was

its own punishment; the poor brute rose blindly to the jump, and missed the bank with a reel and a crash; Sir Eyre was hurled out into the brook, and the hope of the Heavies lay there with his breast and forelegs resting on the ground, his hind quarters in the water, and his back broken. Pas de Charge would never again see the starting-flag waved, or hear the music of the hounds, or feel the gallant life throb and glow through him at the rallying notes of the horn. His race was run.

Not knowing, or looking, or heeding what happened behind, the trio tore on over the meadow and the plowed; the two favorites neck by neck, the game little mare hopelessly behind through that one fatal moment over Brixworth. The turning-flags were passed; from the crowds on the course a great hoarse roar came louder and louder, and the shouts rang, changing every second, "Forest King wins," "Bay Regent wins," "Scarlet and White's ahead," "Violet's up with him," "Violet's past him," "Scarlet recovers," "Scarlet beats," "A cracker on the King," "Ten to one on the Regent," "Guards are over the fence first," "Guards are winning," "Guards are losing," "Guards are beat!!"

Were they!

As the shout rose, Cecil's left stirrup leather snapped and gave way; at the pace they were going most men, ay, and good riders too, would have been hurled out of their saddle by the shock; he scarcely swerved; a moment to ease the King and to recover his equilibrium, then he took the pace up again as though nothing had chanced. And his comrades of the Household when they saw this through their race-glasses, broke through their serenity and burst into a cheer that echoed over the grasslands and the coppices like a clarion, the grand rich voice of the Seraph leading foremost and loudest—a cheer that rolled mellow and triumphant down the cold bright air like the blast of trumpets, and thrilled on Bertie's ear where he came down the course a mile away. It made his heart beat quicker with a victorious headlong delight, as his knees pressed closer into Forest King's flanks, and, half stirrupless like the Arabs, he thundered forward to the greatest riding feat of his life. His face was very calm still, but his blood was in tumult, the delirium of pace has got on him, a minute of life like this was worth a year, and he knew that he would win or die for it, as the land seemed to fly like a

black sheet under him, and, in that killing speed, fence and hedge and double and water all went by him like a dream, whirling underneath him as the gray stretches, stomach to earth, over the level, and rose to leap after leap.

For that instant's pause, when the stirrup broke, threatened to lose him the race.

He was more than a length behind the Regent, whose hoofs as they dashed the ground up sounded like thunder, and for whose herculean strength the plow has no terrors; it was more than the lead to keep now, there was ground to cover, and the King was losing like Wild Geranium. Cecil felt drunk with that strong keen, west wind that blew so strongly in his teeth, a passionate excitation was in him, every breath of winter air that rushed in its bracing currents round him seemed to lash him like a stripe:—the Household to look on and see him beaten!

Certain wild blood that lay latent in Cecil under the tranquil gentleness of temper and of custom, woke, and had the mastery; he set his teeth hard, and his hands clinched like steel on the bridle, "Oh! my beauty, my beauty," he cried, all unconsciously half aloud as they clear the thirty-sixth fence. "Kill me if you like, but don't *fail* me!"

As though Forest King heard the prayer and answered it with all his hero's heart, the splendid form launched faster out, the stretching stride stretched farther yet with lightning spontaneity, every fibre strained, every nerve struggled, with a magnificent bound like an antelope the Gray recovered the ground he had lost, and passed Bay Regent by a quarter-length. It was a neck to neck race once more, across the three meadows with the last and lower fences that were between them and the final leap of all; that ditch of artificial water with the towering double hedge of oak rails and of blackthorn that was reared black and grim and well-nigh hopeless just in front of the Grand Stand. A roar like the roar of the sea broke up from the thronged course as the crowd hung breathless on the even race; ten thousand shouts rang as thrice ten thousand eyes watched the closing contest, as superb a sight as the Shires ever saw while the two ran together, the gigantic Chestnut, with every massive sinew swelled and strained to tension, side by side with the marvellous grace, the shining flanks, and the Arabian-like head of the Guards' horse.

Louder and wilder the shrieked tumult rose: "The Chestnut beats!" "The Gray beats!" "Scarlet's ahead!" "Bay Regent's caught him!" "Violet's winning, Violet's winning!" "The King's neck by neck!" "The King's beating!" "The Guards will get it!" "The Guards' crack has it!" "Not yet, not yet!" "Violet will thrash him at the jump!" "Now for it!" "The Guards, the Guards, the Guards!" "Scarlet will win!" "The King has the finish!" "No, no, no, no!"

Sent along at a pace that Epsom flat never eclipsed, sweeping by the Grand Stand like the flash of electric flame, they ran side to side one moment more, their foam flung on each other's withers, their breath hot in each other's nostrils, while the dark earth flew beneath their stride. The black-thorn was in front behind five bars of solid oak, the water yawning on its farther side, black and deep, and fenced, twelve feet wide if it were an inch, with the same thorn wall beyond it; a leap no horse should have been given, no Steward should have set. Cecil pressed his knees closer and closer, and worked the gallant hero for the test; the surging roar of the throng, though so close, was dull on his ear; he heard nothing, knew nothing, saw nothing but that lean chestnut head beside him, the dull thud on the turf of the flying gallop, and the black wall that reared in his face. Forest King had done so much, could he have stay and strength for this?

Cecil's hands clinched unconsciously on the bridle, and his face was very pale—pale with excitement—as his foot where the stirrup was broken crushed closer and harder against the Gray's flanks.

"Oh, my darling, my beauty—*now!*"

One touch of the spur—the first—and Forest King rose at the leap, all the life and power there were in him gathered for one superhuman and crowning effort; a flash of time, not half a second in duration, and he was lifted in the air higher, and higher, and higher in the cold, fresh, wild winter wind; stakes and rails, and thorn and water lay beneath him black and gaunt and shapeless, yawning like a grave; one bound, even in mid air, one last convulsive impulse of the gathered limbs, and Forest King was over!

And as he galloped up the straight run-in, he was alone. Bay Regent had refused the leap.

As the Gray swept to the Judge's chair, the air was rent with deafening cheers that seemed to reel like drunken shouts from the multitude. "The Guards win, the Guards win;" and when his rider pulled up at the distance with the full sun shining on the scarlet and white, with the gold glisten of the embroidered "*Cœur Vaillant se fait Royaume*," Forest King stood in all his glory, winner of the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon, by a feat without its parallel in all the annals of the Gold Vase.

But as the crowd surged about him, and the mad cheering crowned his victory, and the Household in the splendor of their triumph and the fullness of their gratitude rushed from the drags and the stands to cluster to his saddle, Bertie looked as serenely and listlessly nonchalant as of old, while he nodded to the Seraph with a gentle smile.

"Rather a close finish, eh? Have you any Moselle Cup going there? I'm a little thirsty."

Outsiders would much sooner have thought him defeated than triumphant; no one, who had not known him, could possibly have imagined that he had been successful; an ordinary spectator would have concluded that, judging by the resigned weariness of his features, he had won the race greatly against his own will, and to his own infinite ennui. No one could have dreamt that he was thinking in his heart of hearts how passionately he loved the gallant beast that had been victor with him, and that, if he had followed out the momentary impulse in him, he could have put his arms round the noble bowed neck and kissed the horse like a woman!

The Moselle Cup was brought to refresh the tired champion, and before he drank it Bertie glanced at a certain place in the Grand Stand and bent his head as the cup touched his lips: it was a dedication of his victory to the Queen of Beauty. Then he threw himself lightly out of saddle, and, as Forest King was led away for the after ceremony of bottling, rubbing, and clothing, his rider, regardless of the roar and hubbub of the course, and of the tumultuous cheers, that welcomed both him and his horse from the men who pressed round him, into whose pockets he had put thousands on thousands, and whose ringing hurrahs greeted the "Guards' crack," passed straight up toward Jimmy Delmar and held out his hand.

"You gave me a close thing, Major Delmar. The Vase is as much yours as mine; if your Chestnut had been as good a water jumper as he is a fencer, we should have been neck to neck at the finish."

The browned Indian-sunned face of the Lancer broke up into a cordial smile, and he shook the hand held out to him warmly; defeat and disappointment had cut him to the core, for Jimmy was the first riding man of the Light Cavalry; but he would not have been the frank campaigner that he was if he had not responded to the graceful and generous overture of his rival and conqueror.

"Oh, I can take a beating," he said, good humoredly; "at any rate, I am beat by the Guards, and it is very little humiliation to lose against such riding as yours and such a magnificent brute as your King. I congratulate you most heartily, most sincerely."

And he meant it, too. Jimmy never canted, nor did he ever throw the blame, with paltry savage vindictiveness, on the horse he had ridden. Some men there are—their name is legion—who never allow that it is *their* fault when they are "nowhere;"—oh, no! it is the "cursed screw" always, according to them. But a very good rider will not tell you that.

Cecil, while he talked, was glancing up at the Grand Stand, and when the others dispersed to look over the horses, and he had put himself out of his shell into his sealskin in the dressing-shed, he went up thither without a moment's loss of time.

He knew them all; those dainty beauties with their delicate cheeks just brightened by the western winterly wind, and their rich furs and laces glowing among the colors of their respective heroes; he was the pot of them all, "Beauty" had the suffrages of the sex without exception; he was received with bright smiles and graceful congratulations, even from those who had espoused Eyre Montacute's cause, and still fluttered their losing azure, though the poor hunter lay dead, with his back broken, and a pistol-ball mercifully sent through his brains—the martyr to a man's hot haste, as the dumb things have ever been since creation began.

Cecil passed them as rapidly as he could for one so well received by them, and made his way to the centre of the

Stand, to the same spot at which he had glanced when he had drunk the Moselle.

A lady turned to him; she looked like a rose camellia in her floating scarlet and white, just toned down and made perfect by a shower of Spanish lace; a beautiful brunette, dashing, yet delicate; a little fast, yet intensely thoroughbred; a coquette who would smoke a cigarette, yet a peeress who would never lose her dignity.

"*Au cœur vaillant rien d'impossible!*" she said, with an *envoi* of her lorgnon, and a smile that should have intoxicated him—a smile that might have rewarded a Richepanse for a Hohenlinden. "Superbly ridden! I absolutely trembled for you as you lifted the King to that last leap. It was terrible!"

It was terrible; and a woman, to say nothing of a woman who was in love with him, might well have felt a heartsick fear at sight of that yawning water, and those towering walls of blackthorn, where one touch of the hoofs on the topmost bough, one spring too short of the gathered limbs, must have been death to both horse and rider. But, as she said it, she was smiling, radiant, full of easy calm and racing interest, as became her ladyship who had had "bets at even" before now on Goodwood fillies, and could lead the first flight over the Belvoir and the Quorn countries. It was possible that her ladyship was too thoroughbred not to see a man killed over the oak-rails without deviating into unseemly emotion, or being capable of such bad style as to be agitated.

Bertie, however, in answer, threw the tenderest eloquence into his eyes; very learned in such eloquence.

"If I could not have been victorious while *you* looked on, I would at least not have lived to meet you here!"

She laughed a little, so did he; they were used to exchange these passages in an admirably artistic masquerade, but it was always a little droll to each of them to see the other wear the domino of sentiment; and neither had much credence in the other.

"What a preux chevalier!" cried his Queen of Beauty. "You would have died in a ditch out of homage to me. Who shall say that chivalry is past? Tell me, Bertie, is it so very delightful that desperate effort to break your neck? It looks pleasant, to judge by its effects. It is the only thing in the world that amuses you!"

"Well—there is a great deal to be said for it," replied Bertie, musingly. "You see, until one *has* broken one's neck, the excitement of the thing isn't totally worn out; can't be, naturally, because the—what-do-you-call-it?—consummation isn't attained till then. The worst of it is, it's getting commonplace, getting vulgar, such a number break *their* necks, doing Alps and that sort of thing, that *we* shall have nothing at all left to ourselves soon."

"Not even the monopoly of sporting suicide! Very hard," said her ladyship, with the lowest, most languid laugh in the world, very like "Beauty's" own, save that it had a considerable inflection of studied affectation, of which he, however much of a dandy he was, was wholly guiltless. "Well! you won magnificently; that little black man, who is he? *Lancers*, somebody said?—ran you so fearfully close. I really thought at one time that the *Guards* had lost."

"Do you suppose that a man happy enough to wear Lady Guenevere's colors could lose? An embroidered scarf given by such hands has been a gage of victory ever since the days of tournaments!" murmured Cecil with the softest tenderness, but just enough laziness in the tone and laughter in the eye to make it highly doubtful whether he was not laughing both at her and at himself, and was wondering why the deuce a fellow had to talk such nonsense. Yet she was Lady Guenevere, with whom he had been in love ever since they stayed together at Belvoir for the Croxton Park week the autumn previous; and who was beautiful enough to make their "friendship" as enchanting as a page out of the "*Decamerone*." And while he bent over her, flirting in the fashion that made him the darling of the drawing-rooms, and looking down into her superb Velasquez eyes, he did not know, and if he had known would have been careless of it, that afar off, white with rage, and with his gaze straining on to the course through his race-glass, Ben Davis, "the *Welcher*," who had watched the finish—watched the "*Guards' crack*" landed at the distance—muttered, with a mastiff's savage growl:

"He wins, does he? Curse him! The d—d swell—he shan't win long."

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE À LA MODE.

LIFE was very pleasant at Royallieu.

It lay in the Melton country, and was equally well placed for Pytchley, Quorn, and Belvoir, besides possessing its own small but very perfect pack of "little ladies," or the demoiselles," as they were severally nicknamed; the game was closely preserved, pheasants were fed on Indian corn till they were the finest birds in the country, and in the little winding paths of the elder and bilberry coverts thirty first-rate shots, with two loading-men to each, could find flock and feather to amuse them till dinner, with rocketers and warm corners enough to content the most insatiate of knickerbockered gunners. The stud was superb; the cook, a French artist of consummate genius, who had a brougham to his own use, and wore diamonds of the first water; in the broad beech-studded grassy lands no lesser thing than doe and deer ever swept through the thick ferns in the sunlight and the shadow; a retinue of powdered servants filled the old halls, and guests of highest degree dined in its stately banqueting-room, with its scarlet and gold, its Vandykes and its Vernets, and yet—there was terribly little money at Royallieu with it all. Its present luxury was purchased at the cost of the future, and the parasite of extravagance was constantly sapping, unseen, the gallant old Norman-planted oak of the family-tree. But then, who thought of that? Nobody. It was the way of the House never to take count of the morrow.

True, any one of them would have died a hundred deaths rather than have had one acre of the beautiful green diadem of woods felled by the axe of the timber contractor, or passed to the hands of a stranger; but no one among them ever thought that this was the inevitable end to which they surely drifted with blind and unthinking improvidence. The old Viscount, haughtiest of haughty nobles, would never abate one jot of his accustomed magnificence; and his sons had but imbibed the teaching of all that surrounded them; they did but do in manhood what they had been unconsciously moulded to do in boyhood, when they were sent to Eton at ten with

gold dressing-boxes to grace their Dame's tables, embryo Dukes for their oo-fags, and tastes that already knew to a nicety the worth of the champagnes at the Christopher. The old, old story—how it repeats itself! Boys grow up amid profuse prodigality, and are launched into a world where they can no more arrest themselves, than the feather-weight can pull in the lightning stride of the two-year old, who defies all check, and takes the flat as he chooses. They are brought up like young Dauphins, and tossed into the costly whirl to float as best they can—on nothing. Then, on the lives and deaths that follow; on the graves where a dishonoured alien lies forgotten by the dark Austrian lake-side, or under the monastic shadow of some crumbling Spanish crypt; where a red cross chills the lonely traveller in the virgin solitudes of Amazonian forest aisles, or the wild scarlet creepers of Australia trail over a nameless mound above the trackless stretch of sun-warmed waters—then at them the world “shoots out its lips with scorn.” Not on *them* lies the blame.

A wintry, watery sun was shining on the terraces as Lord Royallieu paced up and down the morning after the Grand Military; his step and limbs excessively enfeebled, but the carriage of his head and the flash of his dark hawk's eyes as proud and untameable as in his earliest years. He never left his own apartments; and no one, save his favorite “little Berk,” ever went to him without his desire. He was too sensitive a man to thrust his age and ailing health in among the young leaders of fashion, the wild men of pleasure, the good wits and the good shots of his son's set; he knew very well that his own day was past; that they would have listened to him out of the patience of courtesy, but that they would have wished him away as “no end of a bore.” He was too shrewd not to know this; but he was too quickly galled ever to bear to have it recalled to him.

He looked up suddenly and sharply: coming toward him he saw the figure of the Guardsman. For “Beauty” the Viscount had no love; indeed, well-nigh a hatred, for a reason never guessed by others, and never betrayed by him.

Bertie was not like the Royallieu race; he resembled his mother's family. She, a beautiful and fragile creature whom her second son had loved, for the first years of his life, as he would have thought it now impossible that he could love any one, had married the Viscount with no affection toward him,

while he had adored her with a fierce and jealous passion that her indifference only inflamed. Throughout her married life, however, she had striven to render loyalty and tenderness toward a lord into whose arms she had been thrown, trembling and reluctant; of his wife's fidelity he could not entertain a doubt, though that he had never won her heart he could not choose but know. He knew more, too; for she had told it him with a noble candor before he wedded her; knew that the man she did love was a penniless cousin, a cavalry officer, who had made a famous name among the wild mountain tribes of Northern India. This cousin, Alan Bertie—a fearless and chivalrous soldier, fitter for the days of knighthood than for these—had seen Lady Royallieu at Nice, some three years after her marriage; accident had thrown them across each other's path; the old love, stronger, perhaps, now than it had ever been, had made him linger in her presence—had made her shrink from sending him to exile. Evil tongues at last had united their names together; Alan Bertie had left the woman he idolized lest slander should touch her through him, and fallen two years later under the dark dank forests on the desolate moorside of the hills of Hindostan, where long before he had rendered "Bertie's Horse" the most famous of all the wild Irregulars of the East.

After her death, Lord Royallieu found Alan's miniature among her papers, and recalled those winter months by the Mediterranean till he cherished, with the fierce, eager, self-torture of a jealous nature, doubts and suspicions that, during her life, one glance from her eyes would have disarmed and abashed. Her second and favorite child bore her family name—her late lover's name; and, in resembling her race, resembled the dead soldier. It was sufficient to make him hate Bertie with a cruel and savage detestation, which he strove indeed to temper, for he was by nature a just man, and, in his better moments, knew that his doubts wronged both the living and the dead; but which colored, too strongly to be dissembled, all his feelings and his actions toward his son, and might both have soured and wounded any temperament less nonchalantly gentle and supremely careless than Cecil's.

As it was, Bertie was sometimes surprised at his father's dislike to him, but never thought much about it, and attributed it, when he did think of it, to the caprices of a tyrannous old man. To be jealous of the favor shown to his boyish

brother could never for a moment have come into his imagination. Lady Royallieu with her last words had left the little fellow, a child of three years old, to the affection and the care of Bertie—himself then a boy of twelve or fourteen—and little as he thought of such things now, the trust of his dying mother had never been wholly forgotten.

A heavy gloom came now over the Viscount's still handsome aquiline, saturnine face, as his second son approached up the terrace; Bertie was too like the cavalry soldier whose form he had last seen standing against the rose light of a Mediterranean sunset. The soldier had been dead eight-and-twenty years; but the jealous hate was not dead yet.

Cecil took off his hunting-cap with a courtesy that sat very well on his habitual languid nonchalance; he never called his father anything but "Royal;" rarely saw, still less rarely consulted him, and cared not a straw for his censure or opinion; but he was too thoroughbred by nature to be able to follow the underbred indecorum of the day which makes disrespect to old age the fashion. "You sent for me?" he asked, taking the cigarette out of his mouth.

"No, sir," answered the old lord, curtly, "I sent for your brother. The fools can't take even a message right now, it seems."

"Shouldn't have named us so near alike; it's often a bore!" said Bertie.

"I didn't name you, sir; your mother named you," answered his father, sharply; the subject irritated him.

"It's of no consequence which!" murmured Cecil, with an expostulatory wave of his cigar. "We're not even asked whether we like to come into the world; we can't expect to be asked what we like to be called in it. Good day to you, sir."

He turned to move away to the house; but his father stopped him; he knew that he had been discourteous—a far worse crime in Lord Royallieu's eyes than to be heartless.

"So you won the Vase yesterday?" he asked, pausing in his walk with his back bowed, but his stern, silver-haired head erect.

"I didn't; the King did."

"That's absurd, sir," said the Viscount, in his resonant and yet melodious voice. "The finest horse in the world may have his back broke by bad riding, and a screw has won

before now when it's been finely handled. The finish was tight, wasn't it?"

"Well—rather. I have ridden closer spins, though. The fallows were light."

Lord Royallieu smiled grimly.

"I know what the Shire 'plow' is like," he said, with a flash of his falcon eyes over the landscape, where, in the days of his youth, he had led the first flight so often, George Rex, and Waterford, and the Berkeleys, and the rest following the rally of his hunting-horn. "You won much in bets?"

"Very fair. Thanks."

"And won't be a shilling richer for it this day next week!" retorted the Viscount, with a rasping, grating irony; he could not help darting savage thrusts at this man who looked at him with eyes so cruelly like Alan Bertie's. "You play 5*l.* points, and lay 500*l.* on the odd trick, I've heard, at your whist in the Clubs—pretty prices for a younger son!"

"Never bet on the odd trick; spoils the game; makes you sacrifice play to the trick. We always bet on the game," said Cecil, with gentle weariness; the sweetness of his temper was proof against his father's attacks upon his patience.

"No matter *what* you bet, sir; you live as if you were a Rothschild while you are a beggar?"

"Wish I were a beggar: fellows always have no end in stock, they say; and your tailor can't worry you very much when all you have to think about is an artistic arrangement of tatters!" murmured Bertie, whose impenetrable serenity was never to be ruffled by his father's bitterness.

"You will soon have your wish, then," retorted the Viscount, with the unprovoked and reasonless passion which he vented on every one, but on none so much as the son he hated. "You are on a royal road to it. I live out of the world, but I hear from it, sir. I hear that there is not a man in the Guards—not even Lord Rockingham—who lives at the rate of imprudence you do; that there is not a man who drives such costly horses, keeps such costly mistresses, games to such desperation, fools gold away with such idiocy as you do. You conduct yourself as if you were a millionaire, sir, and what are you? A pauper on my bounty, and on your brother Montagu's after me—a pauper with a tinsel fashion, a gilded beggary, a Queen's commission to cover a sold-out

poverty, a dandy's reputation to stave off a defaulter's future! A pauper, sir—and a Guardsman!"

The coarse and cruel irony flashed out with wicked scorching malignity, lashing and upbraiding the man who was the victim of his own unwisdom and extravagance.

A slight tinge of color came on his son's face as he heard; but he gave no sign that he was moved, no sign of impatience or anger. He lifted his cap again, not in irony, but with a grave respect in his action that was totally contrary to his whole temperament.

"This sort of talk is very exhausting, very bad style," he said, with his accustomed gentle murmur. "I will bid you good morning, my lord."

And he went without another word. Crossing the length of the old-fashioned Elizabethan terrace, little Berk passed him; he motioned the lad toward the Viscount. "Royal wants to see you, young one."

The boy nodded and went onward; and as Bertie turned to enter the low door that led out to the stables he saw his father meet the lad—meet him with a smile that changed the whole character of his face, and pleasant kindly words of affectionate welcome, drawing his arm about Berkeley's shoulder, and looking with pride upon his bright and gracious youth.

More than an old man's preference would be thus won by the young one; a considerable portion of their mother's fortune, so left that it could not be dissipated, yet could be willed to which son the Viscount chose, would go to his brother by this passionate partiality; but there was not a tinge of jealousy in Cecil; whatever else his faults he had no mean ones, and the boy was dear to him, by a quite unconscious yet unvarying obedience to his dead mother's wish.

"Royal hates me as game-birds hate a red dog. Why the deuce, I wonder?" he thought, with a certain slight touch of pain despite his idle philosophies and devil-may-care indifference. "Well—I *am* good for nothing, I suppose. Certainly I am not good for much, unless it's riding and making love."

With which summary of his merits, "Beauty," who felt himself to be a master in those two arts, but thought himself a bad fellow out of them, sauntered away to join the Seraph and the rest of his guests. His father's words pursuing him

a little despite his carelessness, for they had borne an unequal measure of truth.

"Royal can hit hard," his thoughts continued. "A pauper and a Guardsman! By Jove! it's true enough; but he made me so. They brought me up as if I had a million coming to me, and turned me out among the cracks to take my running with the best of them;—and they give me just about what pays my groom's book! Then they wonder that a fellow goes to the Jews. Where the deuce else can he go?"

And Bertie, whom his gains the day before had not much benefited, since his play-debts, his young brother's needs, and the Zu-Zu's insatiate little hands were all stretched ready to devour them without leaving a sovereign for more serious liabilities, went, for it was quite early morning, to act the M. F. H. in his father's stead at the meet on the great lawns before the house, for the Royallieu "lady-pack" were very famous in the Shires, and hunted over the same country alternate days with the Quorn. They moved off ere long to draw the Holt Wood, in as open a morning, and as strong a scenting wind as ever favored Melton Pink.

A whimper and "gone away!" soon echoed from Beeby-side, and the pack, not letting the fox hang a second, dashed after him, making straight for Scraftoft. One of the fastest things up-wind that hounds ever ran took them straight through the Spinnies, past Hamilton Farm, away beyond Burkby village, and down into the valley of the Wreake without a check, where he broke away, was headed, tried earths, and was pulled down scarce forty minutes from the find. The pack then drew Hungerton foxholes blank, drew Carver's spinnies without a whimper; and lastly, drawing the old familiar Billesden Coplow, had a short quick burst with a brace of cubs, and returning, settled themselves to a fine dog fox that was raced an hour-and-half, hunted slowly for fifty minutes, raced again another hour-and-quarter, sending all the field to their "second horses;" and after a clipping chase through the cream of the grass country, nearly saved his brush in the twilight when scent was lost in a rushing hailstorm, but had the "little ladies" laid on again like wildfire, and was killed with the "who-whoop!" ringing far and away over Glenn Gorse, after a glorious run—thirty miles in and out—with pace that tried the best of them.

A better day's sport even the Quorn had never had in all its brilliant annals, and faster things the Melton men themselves had never wanted: both those who love the "quickest thing you ever knew—thirty minutes without a check—*such* a pace!" and care little whether the *finale* be "killed" or "broke away," and those of older fashion, who prefer "long day, you know, steady as old time, the beauties stuck like wax through fourteen parishes as I live; six hours if it were a minute; horses dead beat; positively walked, you know, no end of a day!" but must have the fatal "who-whoop" as conclusion—both of these, the "new style and the old," could not but be content with the doings of the "Demoiselles" from start to finish.

Was it likely that Cecil remembered the caustic lash of his father's ironies while he was lifting Mother of Pearl over the posts and rails, and sweeping on, with the halloo ringing down the wintry wind as the grasslands flew beneath him? Was it likely that he recollected the difficulties that hung above him while he was dashing down the Gorse happy as a king, with the wild hail driving in his face, and a break of stormy sunshine just welcoming the gallant few who were landed at the death, as twilight fell? Was it likely that he could unlearn all the lessons of his life, and realize in how near a neighborhood he stood to ruin when he was drinking Regency sherry out of his gold flask as he crossed the saddle of his second horse, or, smoking, rode slowly homeward, chatting with the Seraph through the leafless muddy lanes in the gloaming?

Scarcely;—it is very easy to remember our difficulties when we are eating and drinking them, so to speak, in bad soups, and worse wines in continental impecuniosity, sleeping on them as rough Australian shake-downs, or wearing them perpetually in Californian rags and tatters, it were impossible very well to escape from them then; but it is very hard to remember them when every touch and shape of life is pleasant to us—when everything about us is symbolical and redolent of wealth and ease—when the art of enjoyment is the only one we are called on to study, and the science of pleasure all we are asked to explore.

It is well-nigh impossible to believe yourself a beggar while you never want sovereigns for whist; and it would be beyond the powers of human nature to conceive your ruin irrevocable,

while you still eat turbot and terrapin with a powdered giant behind your chair daily. Up in his garret a poor wretch knows very well what he is, and realizes in stern fact the extremities of the last sou, the last shirt, and the last hope; but in these devil-may-care pleasures—in this pleasant, reckless, velvet-soft rush down-hill—in this club-palace, with every luxury that the heart of man can devise and desire, yours to command at your will—it is hard work, *then*, to grasp the truth that the crossing sweeper yonder, in the dust of Pall Mall, is really not more utterly in the toils of poverty than you are!

“Beauty” was never, in the whole course of his days, virtually or physically, or even metaphorically, reminded that he was not a millionaire; much less still was he ever reminded so painfully.

Life petted him, pampered him, caressed him, gifted him, though of half his gifts he never made use; lodged him like a prince, dined him like a king, and never recalled to him by a single privation or a single sensation that he was not as rich a man as his brother-in-arms, the Seraph, future Duke of Lyonesse. How could he then bring himself to understand, as nothing less than truth, the grim and cruel insult his father had flung at him in that brutally bitter phrase—“A Pauper and a Guardsman?” If he had ever been near a comprehension of it, which he never was, he must have ceased to realize it when—pressed to dine with Lord Guenevere near whose house the last fox had been killed, while a groom dashed over to Royallieu for his change of clothes—he caught a glimpse, as they passed through the hall, of the ladies taking their preprandial cups of tea in the library, an enchanting group of lace and silks, of delicate hue and scented hair, of blonde cheeks and brunette tresses, of dark velvets and gossamer tissue; and when he had changed the scarlet for dinner-dress, went down among them to be the darling of that charmed circle, to be smiled on and coquetted with by those soft, languid aristocrats, to be challenged by the lustrous eyes of his *châtelaine* and *chère amie*, to be spoiled as women will spoil the privileged pet of their drawing-rooms whom they have made “free of the guild,” and endowed with flirting commission, and acquitted of anything “serious.”

He was the recognized darling, and permitted property, of the young married beauties; the unwedded knew he was

hopeless for *them*, and tacitly left him to the more attractive conquerors, who hardly prized the Seraph so much as they did Bertie, to sit in their barouches and opera boxes, ride and drive and yacht with them, conduct a Boccaccio intrigue through the height of the season, and make them really believe themselves actually in love while they were at the moors or down the Nile, and would have given their diamonds to get a new distraction.

Lady Guenevere was the last of these, his titled and wedded captors; and perhaps the most resistless of all of them. Neither of them believed very much in their attachment, but both of them wore the masquerade dress to perfection. He had fallen in love with her as much as he ever fell in love, which was just sufficient to amuse him, and never enough to disturb him. He let himself be fascinated, not exerting himself either to resist or advance the affair till he was, perhaps, a little more entangled with her than it was according to his canons expedient to be; and they had the most enchanting—friendship.

Nobody was ever so indiscreet as to call it anything else; and my Lord was too deeply absorbed in the Alderney beauties that stood knee-deep in the yellow straw of his farm-yard, and the triumphant conquests that he gained over his brother peers' Shorthorns and Suffolks, to trouble his head about Cecil's attendance on his beautiful Countess.

They corresponded in Spanish; they had a thousand charming ciphers; they made the columns of the *Times* and the *Post* play the unconscious rôle of medium to appointments; they eclipsed all the pages of Calderon's or Congreve's comedies in the ingenuities with which they met, wrote, got invitations together to the same houses, and arranged signals for mute communication: but there was not the slightest occasion for it all. It passed the time, however, and went far to persuade them that they really were in love, and had a mountain of difficulties and dangers to contend with; it added the "spice to the sauce," and gave them the "relish of being forbidden." Besides, an open scandal would have been very shocking to her brilliant ladyship, and there was nothing on earth, perhaps, of which he would have had a more lively dread than a "scene;" but his present "friendship" was delightful, and presented no such dangers, while his fair "friend" was one of the greatest beauties and the

greatest coquettes of her time. Her smile was honor; her fan was a sceptre; her face was perfect; and her heart never troubled herself or her lovers: if she had a fault, she was a trifle exacting, but that was not to be wondered at in one so omnipotent, and her chains after all were made of roses.

As she sat in the deep ruddy glow of the library fire, with the light flickering on her white brow and her violet velvets; as she floated to the head of her table, with opals shining among her priceless point laces, and some tropical flower with leaves of glistening gold crowning her bronze hair; as she glided down in a waltz along the polished floor, or bent her proud head over écarté in a musing grace that made her opponent utterly forget to mark the king or even play his cards at all; as she talked in the low music of her voice of European imbrogli, and consols and coupons, for she was a politician and a speculator, or lapsed into a beautifully tinted study of *la femme incomprise*, when time and scene suited, when the stars were very clear above the terraces without, and the conservatory very solitary, and a touch of Musset or Owen Meredith chimed in well with the light and shade of the olcanders and the brown lustre of her own eloquent glance;—in all these how superb she was!

And if in truth her bosom only fell with the falling of Shares, and rose with the rising of Bonds; if her soft shadows were only taken up like the purple tinting under her lashes to embellish her beauty; if in her heart of hearts she thought Musset a fool, and wondered why *Lucille* was not written in prose, in her soul far preferring *Le Follet*; why,—it did not matter that I can see. All great ladies gamble in stock nowadays under the rose, and women are for the most part as cold, clear, hard, and practical as their adorers 'believe them the contrary; and a *femme incomprise* is so charming when she avows herself comprehended by *you*, that you would never risk spoiling the confidence by hinting a doubt of its truth. If she and Bertie only played at love; if neither believed much in the other; if each trifled with a pretty gossamer soufflet of passion much as they trifled with their soufflets at dinner; if both tried it to trifle away ennui much as they tried staking a Friederich d'Or at Baden, this light surface fashionable philosophic form of a passion they both laughed at in its hot and serious follies, suited them admirably. Had it ever mingled a grain of bitterness in her

ladyship's Souchong before dinner, or given an aroma of bitterness to her lover's Naples punch in the smoking-room, it would have been out of all keeping with themselves and their world.

Nothing on earth is so pleasant as being a little in love; nothing on earth so destructive as being too much so; and as Cecil in the idle enjoyment of the former gentle luxury flirted with his liege lady that night, lying back in the softest of lounging-chairs, with his dark, dreamy, handsome eyes looking all the eloquence in the world, and his head drooped till his moustaches were almost touching her laces, his Queen of Beauty listened with charmed interest, and to look at him he might have been praying after the poet—

How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

In real truth he was gently murmuring—

"Such a pity that you missed to-day! Hounds found directly; three of the fastest things I ever knew, one after another; you should have seen the 'little ladies' head him just above the Gorse! Three hares crossed us and a fresh fox; some of the pack broke away after the new scent, but old Bluebell, your pet, held on like death, and most of them kept after her—you had your doubts about Silver Trumpet's shoulders; they're not the thing, perhaps, but she ran beautifully all day, and didn't show a symptom of rioting."

Cecil could, when needed, do the Musset and Meredith style of thing to perfection, but on the whole he preferred *love à la mode*; it is so much easier and less exhausting to tell your mistress of a ringing run, or a close finish, than to turn perpetual periods on the lustre of her eyes, and the eternity of your devotion.

Nor did it at all interfere with the sincerity of his worship, that the Zu-Zu was at the prettiest little box in the world, in the neighborhood of Market Harborough, which he had taken for her, and had been at the meet that day in her little toy trap with its pair of snowy ponies and its bright blue liveries that drove so desperately through his finances, and had ridden his hunter Maraschino with immense dash and spirit for a young lady, who had never done anything but pirouette till the last six months, and a total and headlong

disregard of "purlers," very reckless in a white-skinned, bright-eyed, illiterate, avaricious little beauty, whose face was her fortune, and who most assuredly would have been adored no single moment longer had she scarred her fair tinted cheek with the blackthorn, or started as a heroine with a broken nose like Fielding's cherished Amelia. The Zu-Zu might rage, might sulk, might pout, might even swear all sorts of naughty Mabilite oaths, most villainously pronounced, at the ascendancy of her haughty unapproachable patrician rival;—she did do all these things;—but Bertie would not have been the consummate tactician, the perfect flirt, the skilled and steeled campaigner in the boudoirs that he was, if he had not been equal to the delicate task of managing both the peccress and the ballet-dancer with inimitable ability, even when they placed him in the seemingly difficult dilemma of meeting them both with twenty yards between them on the neutral ground of the gathering to see the Pytchley or the Tailby throw off—a task he had achieved with victorious brilliance more than once already this season.

"You drive a team, Beauty—never drive a team," the Seraph had said on occasion over a confidential "sherry-peg" in the mornings, meaning by the metaphor of a team Lady Guenevere, the Zu-Zu, and various other contemporaries in Bertie's affections. "Nothing on earth so dangerous; your leader will bolt, or your off-wheeler will turn sulky, or your young one will passage and make the very deuce of a row; they'll never go quiet till the end, however clever your hand is on the ribbons. Now, I'll drive six-in-hand as soon as any man,—drove a ten-hander last year in the Bois,—when the team comes out of the stables; but I'm hanged if I'd risk my neck with managing even a *pair* of women. Have one clean out of the shafts before you trot out another!"

To which salutary advice Cecil only gave a laugh, going on his own ways with the "team" as before, to the despair of his fidus Achates; the Seraph, being a quarry so incessantly pursued by dowager-beaters, chaperone-keepers, and the whole hunt of the Matrimonial Pack, with those clever nounds Belle and Fashion ever leading in full cry after him, that he dreaded the sight of a ball-room meet; and, shunning the rich preserves of the Salons, ran to earth persistently in the shady Wood of St. John's, and got—at some little cost and some risk of trapping, it is true, but still efficiently—

preserved from all other hunters or poachers by the lawless Robin Hoods and your noirs of those welcome and familiar poverts.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE KEEPER'S TREE.

"You're a lad o' wax, my beauty!" cried Mr. Rake, enthusiastically, surveying the hero of the Grand Military with adoring eyes as that celebrity, without a hair turned or a muscle swollen from his exploit, was having a dressing down after a gentle exercise. "You've pulled it off, haven't you? You've cut the work out for 'em! You've shown 'em what a luster is! Strike me a loser, but what a deal there is in blood. The littlest pippin that ever threw a leg across the pigskin knows that *in* the stables; then why the dickens do the world run against such a plain fact *out* of it!"

And Rake gazed with worship at the symmetrical limbs of the champion of the "First Life," and plunged into speculation on the democratic tendencies of the age as clearly contradicted by all the evidences of the flat and furrow, while Forest King drank a dozen go-downs of water, and was rewarded for the patience with which he had subdued his inclination to kick, fret, spring, and break away throughout the dressing by a full feed thrown into his crib, which Rake watched him with adoring gaze eat to the very last grain.

"You precious one!" soliloquized that philosopher, who loved the horse with a sort of passion since his victory over the Shires. "What a lot o' enemies you've been and gone and made!—that's where it is, my boy; nobody can't never forgive Success. All them fielders have lost such a sight of money by you; them bookmakers have had such a lot of pots upset by you; bless you! if you were on the flat you'd be doctored or roped in no time. You've won for the gentlemen, my lovely—for your own cracks, my boy—and that's just what they'll never pardon you."

And Rake, rendered almost melancholy by his thoughts (he

liked the "gentlemen" himself), went out of the box to get into saddle and ride off on an errand of his master's to the Zu-Zu at her tiny hunting-lodge, where the snow-white ponies made her stud, and where she gave enchanting little hunting-dinners, at which she sang equally enchanting little hunting-songs, and arrayed herself in the Fontainebleau hunting costume, gold-hilted knife and all, and spent Cecil's winnings for him with a rapidity that threatened to leave very few of them for the London season. She was very pretty; sweetly pretty; with that wanted no gold powder, the clearest, sauciest eyes, and the handsomest mouth in the world; but of grammar she had not a notion, of her aspirates she had never a recollection, of conversation she had not an idea, of slang she had, to be sure, a *répertoire*, but to this was her command of language limited. She dressed perfectly, but she was a vulgar little soul; drank everything, from Bass's ale to rum-punch, and from cherry-brandy to absinthe; thought it the height of wit to stifle you with cayenne slid into your vanilla ice, and the climax of repartee to cram your hat full of peach stones and lobster shells; was thoroughly avaricious, thoroughly insatiate, thoroughly heartless, pillaged with both hands, and then never had enough; had a coarse good nature when it cost her nothing, and was "as jolly as a grig," according to her phraseology, so long as she could stew her pigeons in champagne, drink wines and liqueurs that were beyond price, take the most dashing trap in the Park up to Flirtation Corner, and laugh and sing and eat Richmond dinners, and show herself at the Opera with Bertie or some other "swell" attached to her, in the very box next to a Duchess.

The Zu-Zu was perfectly happy; and as for the pathetic pictures that novelists and moralists draw, of vice sighing amid turtle and truffles for childish innocence in the cottage at home where honeysuckles blossomed and brown brooks made melody, and passionately grieving on the purple cushions of a barouche for the time of straw pallets and untroubled sleep, why,—the Zu-Zu would have vaulted herself on the box seat of a drag, and told you "to stow all that trash!" her childish recollections were of a stifling lean-to with the odor of pigsty and strawyard, pork for a feast once a week, starvation all the other six days, kicks, slaps, wrangling, and a general atmosphere of beer and wash-tubs; she hated her

past, and loved her cigar on the drag. The Zu-Zu is fact; the moralists' pictures are moonshine.

The Zu-Zu is an openly acknowledged fact, moreover, daily becoming more prominent in the world, more brilliant, more frankly recognized, and more omnipotent. Whether this will ultimately prove for the better or the worse, it would be a bold man who should dare say; there is at least one thing left to desire in it—*i. e.* that the synonym of "Aspasia," which serves so often to designate in journalistic literature these Free Lances of life, were more suitable in artistic and intellectual similarity, and that when the Zu-Zu and her sisterhood plunge their white arms elbow-deep into so many fortunes, and rule the world right and left as they do, they could also sound their H's properly, and know a little orthography, if they could not be changed into such queens of grace, of intellect, of sovereign mind and splendid wit as were their prototypes when she whose name they debase held her rule in the City of the Violet Crown, and gathered about her Phidias the divine, haughty and eloquent Antipho, the gay Crates, the subtle Protagoras, Cratinus so acrid and yet so jovial, Damon of the silver lyre, and the great poets who are poets for all time. Author and artist, noble and soldier, court the Zu-Zu order now as the Athenians courted their brilliant *étrapai*; but it must be confessed that the Hellenic idols were of a more exalted type than are the Hyde Park goddesses!

However, the Zu-Zu was the rage, and spent Bertie's money when he got any just as her wilful sovereignty fancied, and Rake rode on now with his master's note, bearing no very good will to her; for Rake had very strong prejudices, and none stronger than against these fair pillagers who went about seeking whom they should devour, and laughing at the wholesale ruin that they wrought while the sentimentalists babbled in "Social Science" of "pearls lost" and "innocence betrayed."

"A girl that used to eat tripe and red herring in a six-pair back, and dance for a shilling a night in gauze, coming it so grand that she'll only eat asparagus in March, and drink the best Brands with her truffles! Why, she ain't worth sixpence thrown away on her, unless it's worth while to hear how hard she can swear at you!" averred Rake, in his eloquence; and he was undoubtedly right for that matter; but then—the

Zu-Zu was the rage, and if ever she should be sold up, great ladies would crowd to her sale and buy with eager curiosity at high prices her most trumpery pots of pomatum, her most flimsy gew-gaws of marqueterie!

Rake had seen a good deal of men and manners, and, in his own opinion at least, was "up to every dodge on the cross" that this iniquitous world could unfold. A bright, lithe, animated, vigorous, yellow-haired, and sturdy fellow, seemingly with a dash of the Celt in him that made him vivacious and peppery, Mr. Rake polished his wits quite as much as he polished the tops, and considered himself a philosopher. Whose son he was he had not the remotest idea; his earliest recollections were of the tender mercies of the workhouse; but even that chill foster-mother, the parish, had not damped the liveliness of his temper or the independence of his opinions, and as soon as he was fifteen Rake had run away and joined a circus, distinguishing himself there by his genius for standing on his head and tying his limbs into a porter's knot.

From the circus he migrated successively into the shape of a comic singer, a tapster, a navvy, a bill-sticker, a guacho in Mexico (working his passage out), a fireman in New York, a ventriloquist in Maryland, a vaquero in Spanish California, a lemonade-seller in San Francisco, a revolutionist in the Argentine (without the most distant idea what he fought for), a boatman on the Bay of Mapiri, a blacksmith in Santarem, a trapper in the Wilderness, and finally, working his passage home again, took the Queen's shilling in Dublin, and was drafted into a light-cavalry regiment. With the —th he served half a dozen years in India, a rough-rider, a splendid fellow in a charge or a pursuit, with an astonishing power over horses, and the clearest back-handed sweep of a sabre that ever cut down a knot of natives; *but*—insubordinate. Do his duty whenever fighting was in question, he did most zealously; but to kick over the traces at other times was a temptation that at last became too strong for that lawless lover of liberty.

From the moment that he joined the regiment, a certain Corporal Warne and he had conceived an antipathy to one another, which Rake had to control as he might, and which the Corporal was not above indulging in every petty piece of tyranny that his rank allowed him to exercise. On active

Service Rake was, by instinct, too good a soldier not to manage to keep the curb on himself tolerably well, though he was always regarded in his troop rather as a hound that *will* "riot" is regarded in the pack; but when the —th came back to Brighton and to barracks, the evil spirit of rebellion began to get a little hotter in him under the Corporal's "Idées Napoleoniennes" of justifiable persecution. Warne indisputably provoked his man in a cold, iron, strictly lawful sort of manner, moreover, all the more irritating to a temper like Rake's.

"Hanged if I care how the officers come it over me; they're gentlemen, and it don't try a fellow," would Rake say in confidential moments over purl and a penn'orth of bird's eye, his experience in the Argentine Republic having left him with strongly aristocratic prejudices; "but when it comes to a duffer like that, that knows no better than me, what *ain't* a bit better than me, and what is as clumsy a duffer about a horse's plates as ever I knew, and would a'most let a young 'un buck him out of his saddle, why then I do cut up rough, I ain't denying it, and I don't see what there is in his Stripes to give him such a license to be aggravating."

With which Rake would blow the froth off his pewter with a puff of concentrated wrath, and an oath against his non-commissioned officers that might have let some light in upon the advocates for "promotion from the ranks" had they been there to take the lesson. At last, in the leisure of Brighton, the storm broke. Rake had a Scotch hound that was the pride of his life, his beer-money often going instead to buyainties for the dog, who became one of the channels through which Warne could annoy and thwart him. The dog did no harm, being a fine, well-bred deerhound; but it pleased the Corporal to consider that it did, simply because it belonged to Rake, whose popularity in the corps, owing to his good nature, his good spirits, and his innumerable tales of American experiences and amorous adventures, increased the jealous dislike which his knack with an unbroken colt and his abundant stable science had first raised in his superior.

One day in the chargers' stables the hound ran out of a loose box with a rush to get at Rake, and upset a pailful of warm mash. The Corporal, who was standing by in harness, hit him over the head with a heavy whip he had in his hand; infuriated by the pain, the dog flew at him, tearing his over-

ables with a fierce crunch of his teeth. "Take the brute off, and string him up with a halter; I've put up with him too long!" cried Warne to a couple of privates working near in their stable dress. Before the words were out of his 'mouth, Rake threw himself on him with a bound like lightning, and, wrenching the whip out of his hands struck him a slashing, stinging blow across his face.

"Hang my hound, you cur! If you touch a hair of him I'll double-thong you within an inch of your life!"

And assuredly he would have kept his word had he not been made a prisoner and marched off to the guard-room.

Rake learnt the stern necessity of the law, which, for the sake of *morale*, must make the soldiers, whose blood is wanted to be like fire on the field, patient, pulseless, and enduring of every provocation, cruelty, and insolence in the camp and the barrack, as though they were statues of stones,—a needful law, a wise law, an indispensable law, doubtless, but a very hard law to be obeyed by a man full of life and all life's passions.

At the court-martial on his mutinous conduct, which followed, many witnesses brought evidence, on being pressed, to the unpopularity of Warne in the regiment, and to his harshness and his tyranny to Rake. Many men spoke out what had been chained down in their thoughts for years; and, in consideration of the provocation received, the prisoner, who was much liked by the officers, was condemned to six months' imprisonment for his insubordination and blow to his superior officer, without being tied up to the triangles. At the court-martial, Cecil, who chanced to be in Brighton after Goodwood, was present one day with some other Guardsmen, and the look of Rake, with his cheerfulness under difficulties, his love for the hound, and his bright, sunburnt, shrewd, humorous countenance, took his fancy.

"Beauty" was the essence of good nature. Indolent himself, he hated to see anything or anybody worried; lazy, gentle, wayward, and spoilt by his own world, he was still never so selfish and philosophic as he pretended but what he would do a kindness if one came in his way; it is not a very great virtue, perhaps, but it is a rare one.

"Poor devil! struck the other because he wouldn't have his dog hanged. Well, on my word I should have done the same in his place, if I could have got up the pace for so much

assertion," murmured Cecil to his cheroot, careless of the demoralizing tendency of his remarks for the army in general. Had it occurred in the Guards, and he had "sat" on the case, Rake would have had one very lenient judge.

As it was, Bertie actually went the lengths of thinking seriously about the matter; he liked Rake's devotion to his dumb friend, and he heard of his intense popularity in his troop; he wished to save, if he could, so fine a fellow from the risks of his turbulent passion, and from the stern fetters of a trying discipline; hence, when Rake found himself condemned to his cell, he had a message sent him by Bertie's groom that when his term of punishment should be over, Mr. Cecil would buy his discharge from the Service and engage him as extra body-servant, having had a good account of his capabilities; he had taken the hound to his own kennels.

Now, the fellow had been thoroughly devil-me-care throughout the whole course of the proceedings, had heard his sentence with sublime impudence, and had chaffed his sentinels with an utterly reckless nonchalance; but somehow or other, when that message reached him, a vivid sense that he was a condemned and disgraced man suddenly flooded in on him; a passionate gratitude seized him to the young aristocrat who had thought of him in his destitution and condemnation, who had even thought of his dog; and Rake, the philosophic and the undauntable, could have found it in his heart to kneel down in the dust and kiss the stirrup-leather when he held it for his new master, so strong was the loyalty he bore from that moment to Bertie.

Martinetts were scandalized at a Life Guardsman taking as his private valet a man who had been guilty of such conduct in the Light Cavalry; but Cecil never troubled his head about what people said; and so invaluable did Rake speedily become to him, that he had kept him about his person wherever he went from then until now, two years after.

Rake loved his master with a fidelity very rare in these days; he loved his horses, his dogs, everything that was his, down to his very rifle and boots, slaved for him cheerfully, and was as proud of the deer he stalked, of the brace he bagged, of his winnings when the Household played the Zingari, or his victory when his yacht won the Cherbourg Cup, as though those successes had been Rake's own.

"My dear Seraph," said Cecil himself once on this point to

the Marquis, "if you want generosity, fidelity, and all the rest of the cardinal what-d'ye-call-ems—sins, ain't it?—go to noble-hearted Scamp; *he'll* stick to you till he kills himself. If you want to be cheated, get a Respectable Immaculate; *he'll* swindle you piously, and decamp with your Doncaster Vase."

And Rake, who assuredly had been an out-and-out scamp, made good Bertie's creed; he "stuck to him" devoutly, and no terrier was ever more alive to an otter than he was to the Guardsman's interests. It was that very vigilance which made him, as he rode back from the Zu-Zu's in the twilight, notice what would have escaped any save one who had been practised as a trapper in the red Canadian woods, namely, the head of a man almost hidden among the heavy though leafless brushwood and the yellow gorse of a spinney which lay on his left in Royallieu Park. Rake's eyes were telescopic and microscopic; moreover, they had been trained to know such little signs as a marsh from a hen harrier in full flight, by the length of wing and tail, and a widgeon or a coot from a mallard or a teal, by the depth each swam out of the water. Gray and foggy as it was, and high as was the gorse, Rake recognized his born-foe Willon.

"What's he up to there?" thought Rake, surveying the place, which was wild, solitary, and an unlikely place enough for a head groom to be found in. "If he ain't a rascal, I never see one; it's my belief he cheats the stable thick and thin, and gets on Mr. Cecil's mounts to a good tune—ay, and would nobble 'em as soon as not, if it just suited his book; that blessed King hates the man; how he lashes his heels at him!"

It was certainly possible that Willon might be passing an idle hour in potting rabbits, or be otherwise innocently engaged enough; but the sight of him there among the gorse was a sight of suspicion to Rake. Instantaneous thoughts darted through his mind of tethering his horse, and making a reconnaissance safely and unseen with the science at stalking brute or man that he had learnt of his friends the Sioux. But second thoughts showed him this was impossible. The horse he was on was a mere colt just breaking in, who had barely had so much as a "dumb jockey" on his back, and stand for a second the colt would not.

"At any rate, I'll unearth him," thought Rake, with his

latent animosity to the head groom, and his vigilant loyalty to Cecil overruling any scruple as to his right to overlook his foe's movements; and with a gallop that was muffled on the heather'd turf he dashed straight at the covert unperceived till he was within ten paces. Willon started and looked up hastily; he was talking to a square-built man very quietly dressed in shepherd's plaid, chiefly remarkable by a red-hued beard and whiskers.

The groom turned pale, and laughed nervously as Rake pulled up with a jerk.

"You on that young 'un again? Take care you don't get bucked out o' saddle in the shape of a cocked hat."

"I ain't afraid of going to grass, if you are!" retorted Rake, scornfully; boldness was not his enemy's strong point. "Who's your pal, old fellow?"

"A cousin o' mine, out o' Yorkshire," vouchsafed Mr. Willon, looking anything but easy, while the cousin aforesaid nodded sulkily on the introduction.

"Ah! looks like a Yorkshire tyke," muttered Rake, with a volume of meaning condensed in these innocent words. "A nice, dry, cheerful sort of place to meet your cousin in, too; uncommon lively; hope it'll raise his spirits to see all *his* cousins a grinning there; his spirits don't seem much in sorts now," continued the ruthless inquisitor, with a glance at the "keeper's tree" by which they stood, in the middle of dank undergrowth, whose branches were adorned with dead cats, rats, owls, kestrels, stoats, weasels, and martens. To what issue the passage of arms might have come it is impossible to say, for at that moment the colt took matters into his own hands, and bolted with a rush, that even Rake could not pull in till he had had a mile-long "pipe-opener."

"Something up there," thought that sagacious, rough-rider; "if that red-haired chap ain't a rum lot, I'll eat him. I've seen his face, too, somewhere; where the deuce was it? Cousin; yes, cousins, in Queer Street, I dare say! Why should he go and meet his 'cousin' out in the fog there, when if you took twenty cousins home to the servants' hall nobody'd ever say anything? If that Willon ain't as deep as Old Harry——"

And Rake rode into the stable-yard, thoughtful and intensely suspicious of the rendezvous under the keeper's tree in the outlying coverts. He would have been more so had

he guessed that Ben Davis's red beard and demure attire with other as efficient disguises, had prevented even his own keen eyes from penetrating the identity of Willon's "cousin" with the Welcher he had seen thrust off the course the day before by his master.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF A RINGING RUN.

"Tally-ho! is the word, clap spurs and let's follow,
The world has no charm like a rattling view-halloa!"

Is hardly to be denied by anybody in this land of fast bursts and gallant M.F.H.'s, whether they "ride to hunt," or "hunt to ride," in the immortal distinction of Assheton Smith's old whip: the latter class, by-the-by, becoming far and away the larger, in these days of rattling gallops and desperate breathers. Who cares to patter after a fly old dog-fox, that, fat and wary, leads the pack a tedious interminable wind in and out through gorse and spinney, bricks himself up in a drain, and takes an hour to be dug out, dodges about till twilight, and makes the hounds pick the scent slowly and wretchedly over marsh and through water? Who would not give fifty guineas a second for the glorious thirty minutes of *racing* that show steam and steel over fence and fallow in a clipping rush without a check from find to finish? So be it ever! The riding that graces the Shires, that makes Tedworth and Pytchley, the Duke's and the Fitzwilliam's, household words and "names beloved," that fills Melton and Market Harborough, and makes the best flirts of the ball-room gallop fifteen miles to covert, careless of hail or rain, mire or slush, mist or cold, so long as it is a fine scenting wind, is the same riding that sent the Six Hundred down into the blaze of the Muscovite guns, that in our father's days gave to Grant's Hussars their swoop, like eagles, on to the rear-guard at Morales, and that in the grand old East and the rich trackless West, makes exiled campaigners with high English names seek and win an *aristeia* of their own at the

head of their wild Irregular Horse, who would charge hel' itself at their bidding.

Now in all the Service there was not a man who loved hunting better than Bertie. Though he was incorrigibly lazy, and inconceivably effeminate in every one of his habits, though he suggested a portable lounging-chair as an improvement at battues so that you might shoot sitting, drove to every breakfast and garden party in the season in his brougham with the blinds down lest a grain of dust should touch him, thought a waltz too exhaustive, and a saunter down Pall Mall too tiring, and asked to have the end of a novel told him in the clubs because it was too much trouble to read on a warm day,—though he was more indolent than any spoiled Creole, "Beauty" never failed to head the first flight, and adored a hard day cross country, with an east wind in his eyes and the fleet in his teeth. The only trouble was to make him get up in time for it.

"Mr. Cecil, sir, if you please, the drag will be round in ten minutes," said Rake, with a dash of desperation for the seventh time into his chamber, one fine scenting morning.

"I don't please," answered Cecil, sleepily, finishing his cup of coffee, and reading a novel of La Demirep's.

"The other gentlemen are all down, sir, and you will be too late."

"Not a bit. They must wait for me," yawned Bertie.

Crash came the Seraph's thunder on the panels of the door, and a strong volume of Turkish through the keyhole: "Beauty, Beauty, are you dead?"

"Now, what an inconsequent question!" expostulated Cecil, with appealing rebuke. "If a fellow *were* dead, how the devil could he say he was? Do be logical, Seraph."

"Get up!" cried the Seraph with a deafening rataplan, and a final dash of his colossal stature into the chamber. "We've all done breakfast; the traps are coming round; you'll be an hour behind time at the meet."

Bertie lifted his eyes with plaintive resignation from the Demirep's yellow-papered romance.

"I'm really in an interesting chapter: Aglae has just had a marquis kill his son, and two brothers kill each other in the Bois, about her, and is on the point of discovering a man she's in love with to be her own grandfather; the complication is absolutely thrilling," murmured Beauty, whom nothing

could ever "thrill," not even plunging down the Matterhorn, losing "long odds in thou" over the Oaks, or being sunned in the eyes of the fairest woman of Europe.

The Seraph laughed, and tossed the volume straight to the other end of the chamber.

"Confound you, Beauty, get up!"

"Never swear, Seraph, not ever so mildly," yawned Cecil; "it's gone out, you know; only the cads and the clergy can damn one nowadays; it's such bad style to be so impulsive. Look! you have broken the back of my Demirep!"

"You deserve to break the King's back over the first cropper," laughed the Seraph. "Do get up!"

"Bother," sighed the victim, raising himself with reluctance, while the Seraph disappeared in a cloud of Turkish.

Neither Bertie's indolence nor his *insouciance* were assumed, utter carelessness was his nature, utter impassability was his habit, and he was truly for the moment loth to leave his bed, his coffee, and his novel; he must have his leg over the saddle, and feel the strain on his arms of that "pulling" pace with which the King always went when once he settled into his stride, before he would really think about winning.

The hunting breakfasts of our forefathers and of our present squires found no favour with Bertie; a slice of game and a glass of Curacoa were all he kept the drag waiting to swallow, and the four bays going at a pelting pace, he and the rest of the Household who were gathered at Royallieu were by good luck in time for the throw-off of the Quorn, where the hero of the Blue Ribbon was dancing impatiently under Willon's hand, scenting the fresh, keen, sunny air, and knowing as well what all those bits of scarlet straying in through field and lane, gate and gap, meant, as well as though the merry notes of the master's horn were winding over the gorse. The meet was brilliant and very large; showing such a gathering as only the Melton country can; and foremost among the crowd of carriages, hacks, and hunters, were the beautiful roan mare Vivandière of the Lady Guenevere, mounted by that exquisite peeress in her violet habit, and her tiny velvet hat; and the pony equipage of the Zu-Zu, all glittering with azure and silver, leopard rugs, and snowy reins: the breadth of half an acre of grassland was between them, but the groups of men about them were tolerably equal for number and for rank.

"Take Zu-Zu off my hands for this morning, Seraph, there's a good fellow," murmured Cecil, as he swung himself into saddle. The Seraph gave a leonine growl, sighed, and acquiesced. He detested women in the hunting-field, but that sweetest tempered giant of the Brigades never refused anything to anybody—much less to "Beauty."

To an uninitiated mind it would have seemed marvellous and beautiful in its combination of simplicity and intricacy, to have noted the delicate tactics with which Bertie conducted himself between his two claimants;—bending to his Countess with a reverent devotion that assuaged whatever of incensed perception of her unacknowledged rival might be silently lurking in her proud heart; wheeling up to the pony-trap under cover of speaking to the men from Egerton Lodge, and restoring the Zu-Zu from sulkiness, by a propitiatory offer of a little gold sherry-flask, studded with turquoises, just ordered for her from Regent Street, which, however, she ungraciously contemned, because she thought it had only cost twenty guineas; anchoring the victimized Seraph beside her by an adroit "Ah! by-the-way, Rock, give Zu-Zu one of your rose-scented *papelitos*; she's been wild to smoke them;" and leaving the Zu-Zu content at securing a future Duke, was free to canter back and flirt on the off-side of Vivandière, till the "signal," the "cast," made with consummate craft, the waving of the white stems among the brushwood, the tightening of girths, the throwing away of cigars, the challenge, the whimper, and the "stole away!" sent the field headlong down the course after as fine a long-legged greyhound fox as ever carried a brush.

Away he went in a rattling spin, breaking straight at once for the open, the hounds on the scent like mad: with a tally-ho that thundered through the cloudless, crisp, cold, glittering noon, the field dashed off pell-mell, the violet habit of her ladyship, and the azure skirts of the Zu-Zu foremost of all in the rush through the spinneys; while Cecil on the King, and the Seraph on a magnificent white weight-carrier, as thoroughbred and colossal as himself, led the way with them. The scent was hot as death in the spinneys, and the pack raced till nothing but a good one could live with them; few but good ones, however, were to be found with the Quorn, and the field held together superbly over the first fence, and on across the grassland, the game old fox giving no sign of going to

covert, but running straight as a crow flies, while the pace grew terrific.

"Beats cock-fighting!" cried the Zu-Zu, while her blue skirts fluttered in the wind, as she lifted Cecil's brown mare, very cleverly, over a bilberry hedge, and set her little white teeth with a will on the Seraph's otto-of-rose cigarette. Lady Guenevere heard the words as Vivandière rose in the air with the light bound of a roe, and a slight superb dash of scorn came into her haughty eyes for the moment; she never seemed to know that "that person" in the azure habit even existed, but the contempt awoke in her, and shone in her glance, while she rode on as that fair leader of the Belvoir and Pythley alone could ride over the fallows.

The steam was on at full pressure, the hounds held close to his brush, heads up sterns down, running still straight as an arrow over the open, past coppice and covert, through gorse and spinney, without a sign of the fox making for shelter. Fence and double, hedge and brook, soon scattered the field; straying off far and wide, and coming to grief with lots of "downers," it grew select, and few but the crack men could keep the hounds in view. "Catch 'em who can," was the one *mot d'ordre*, for they were literally racing, the line-hunters never losing the scent a second, as the fox, taking to dodging, made all the trouble he could for them through the rides of the woods. Their working was magnificent, and, heading him, they ran him round and round in a ring, viewed him for a second, and drove him out of covert once more into the pastures, while they laid on at a hotter scent and flew after him like staghounds.

Only half a dozen were up with them now; the pace was tremendous, though all over grass; here a flight of posts and rails tried the muscle of the boldest; there a bullfinch yawned behind the blackthorn; here a big fence towered; there a brook rushed angrily among its rushes; while the keen, easterly wind blew over the meadows, and the pack screamed along like the white trail of a plume. Cecil "showed the way" with the self-same stride and the self-same fencing as had won him the Vase. Lady Guenevere and the Seraph were running almost even with him; three of the Household farther down; the Zu-Zu and some Melton men two meadows off; the rest of the field, nowhere. Fifty-two minutes had gone by in that splendid running, without a single check.

while the fox raced as gamely and as fast as at the find; the speed was like lightning past the brown woods, the dark-green pine plantations, the hedges, bright with scarlet berries; through the green low-lying grasslands, and the winding drives of coverts, and the boles of ash-hued beech trunks, whose roots the violets were just purpling with their blossom; while far away stretched the blue haze of the distance, and above-head a flight of rooks cawed merrily in the bright air, soon left far off as the pack swept onward in the most brilliant thing of the hunting year.

"Water! take care!" cried Cecil, with a warning wave of his hand as the hounds with a splash like a torrent dashed up to their necks in a broad brawling brook that Reynard had swam in first style, and struggled as best they could after him. It was an awkward bit, with bad taking-off and a villainous mud-bank for landing; and the water, thickened and swollen with recent rains, had made all the land that sloped to it miry and soft as sponge. It was the risk of life and limb to try it; but all who still viewed the hounds, catching Bertie's shout of warning, worked their horses up for it, and charged toward it as hotly as troops charge a square. Forest King was over like a bird; the winner of the Grand Military was not to be daunted by all the puny streams of the Shires; the artistic riding of the Countess landed Vivandière, with a beautiful clear spring, after him by a couple of lengths: the Seraph's handsome white hunter, brought up at a headlong gallop with characteristic careless dash and fine science mingled, cleared it; but, falling with a mighty crash, gave him a purler on the opposite side, and was within an ace of striking him dead with his hoof in frantic struggles to recover. The Seraph, however, was on his legs with a rapidity marvellous in a six-foot-three son of Anak, picked up the horse, threw himself into saddle, and dashed off again quick as lightning, with his scarlet stained all over, and his long fair moustaches floating in the wind. The Zu-Zu turned Mother of Pearl back with a fiery French oath; she hated to be "cut down," but she liked still less to risk her neck; and two of the Household were already treated to "crackers" that disabled them for the day, while one Melton man was pitched head-foremost into the brook, and another was sitting dolorously on the bank with his horse's head in his lap, and the poor brute's spine broken. There were only three of the first

riders in England now alone with the hounds, who, with a cold scent as the fox led them through the angular corner of a thick pheasant covert, stuck like wax to the line, and working him out, viewed him once more, for one wild, breathless, tantalizing second, and, on a scent breast-high, raced him with the rush of an express through the straggling street of a little hamlet, and got him out again on the level pastures and across a fine line of hunting country, with the leafless woods and the low gates of a park far away to their westward.

"A guinea to a shilling that we kill him," cried the flute-voice of her brilliant ladyship, as she ran a moment side by side with Forest King, and flashed her rich eyes on his rider; she had scorned the Zu-Zu, but on occasion she would use betting slang and racing slang with the daintiest grace in the world herself without their polluting her lips. As though the old fox heard the wager, he swept in a beel round toward the woods on the right, making, with all the craft and the speed there were in him, for the deep shelter of the boxwood and laurel. "After him, my beauties, my beauties—if he run there he'll go to ground and save his brush!" thundered the Seraph as though he were hunting his own hounds at Lyonesse, who knew every tone of his rich clarion notes as well as they knew every wind of his horn. But the young ones of the pack saw Reynard's move and his meaning as quickly as he did; having run fast before, they flew now: the pace was terrific. Two fences were crossed as though they were paper; the meadows raced with lightning speed, a ha-ha leaped, a gate cleared with a crashing jump, and in all the furious excitement of "view," they tore down the mile-long length of an avenue, dashed into a flower-garden, and smashing through a gay trellis-work of scarlet creeper, plunged into the home-paddock and killed with as loud a shout ringing over the country in the bright sunny day as ever was echoed by the ringing cheers of the Shire; Cecil, the Seraph, and her victorious ladyship alone coming in for the glories of the "finish."

"Never had a faster seventy minutes up-wind," said Lady Guenevere, looking at the tiny jewelled watch, the size of a sixpence, that was set in the handle of her whip, as the brush, with all the compliments customary, was handed to her. She had won twenty before.

The park, so unceremoniously entered, belonged to a baronet,

who, though he hunted little himself, honored the sport and scorned a vulpecide; he came out naturally and begged them to lunch. • Lady Guenevere refused to dismount, but consented to take a biscuit and a little Lafitte, while clarets, liqueurs, and ales, with anything else they wanted, were brought to her companions. The stragglers strayed in; the M. F. H. came up just too late; the men getting down, gathered about the Countess or lounged on the gray stone steps of the Elizabethan house. The sun shone brightly on the oriel casements, the antique gables, the twisted chimneys, all covered with crimson parasites and trailing ivy; the horses, the scarlet, the pack in the paddock adjacent, the shrubberies of laurel and araucaria, the sun-tinted terraces, made a bright and picturesque grouping. Bertie, with his hand on Vivandière's pommel, after taking a deep draught of sparkling Rhenish, looked on at it all with a pleasant sigh of amusement.

"By Jove," he murmured softly, with a contented smile about his lips, "that *was* a ringing run!"

At that very moment, as the words were spoken, a groom approached him hastily; his young brother, whom he had scarcely seen since the find, had been thrown and taken home on a hurdle; the injuries were rumored to be serious.

Bertie's smile faded; he looked very grave: world-spoiled as he was, reckless in everything, and egotist though he had long been by profession, he loved the lad.

When he entered the darkened room, with its faint chloroform odor, the boy lay like one dead, his bright hair scattered on the pillow, his chest bare, and his right arm broken and splintered. The deathlike coma was but the result of the chloroform; but Cecil never stayed to ask or remember that: he was by the couch in a single stride, and dropped down by it, his head bent on his arms.

"It is my fault," I should have looked to him."

The words were very low; he hated that any should see he could still be such a fool as to *feel*. A minute, and he conquered himself; he rose, and with his hand on the boy's fair tumbled curls, turned calmly to the medical men who, attached to the household, had been on the spot at once.

"What is the matter?"

"Fractured arm, contusion, nothing serious, nothing at all,

at his age," replied the surgeon; "when he wakes out of the ethargy he will tell you so himself, Mr. Cecil."

"You are certain?"—do what he would his voice shook a little; his hand had not shaken, two days before, when nothing less than ruin or ransom had hung on his losing or winning the race.

"Perfectly certain," answered the surgeon cheerfully. "He is not overstrong, to be sure, but the contusions are slight; he will be out of that bed in a fortnight."

"How did he fall?"

But while they told him he scarcely heard; he was looking at the handsome Antinous-like form of the lad as it lay stretched helpless and stricken before him; and he was remembering the death-bed of their mother, when the only voice he had ever revered had whispered, as she pointed to the little child of three summers:—"When you are a man, take care of him, Bertie." How had he fulfilled the injunction? Into how much brilliantly-tinted evil had he not led him—by example at least?

The surgeon touched his arm apologetically, after a lengthened silence:

"Your brother will be best unexcited when he comes to himself, sir; look—his eyes are unclosing now. Could you do me the favor to go to his lordship? His grief made him perfectly wild—so dangerous to his life at his age. We could only persuade him to retire, a few minutes ago, on the plea of Mr. Berkeley's safety. If you could see him——"

Cecil went, mechanically almost, and with a grave, weary depression on him; he was so unaccustomed to think at all, so utterly unaccustomed to think painfully, that he scarcely knew what ailed him. Had he had his old tact about him, he would have known how worse than useless it would be for him to seek his father in such a moment.

Lord Royallieu was lying back exhausted as Cecil opened the door of his private apartments, heavily darkened and heavily perfumed; at the turn of the lock he started up eagerly.

"What news of him?"

"Good news, I hope," said Cecil gently, as he came forward. "The injuries are not grave, they tell me. I am so sorry that I never watched his fencing, but——"

The old man had not recognized him till he heard his voice,

and he waved him off with a fierce contemptuous gesture; the grief for his favorite's danger, the wild terrors that his fears had conjured up, his almost frantic agony at the sight of the accident, had lashed him into passion well-nigh delirious.

"Out of my sight, sir," he said fiercely, his mellow tones quivering with rage. "I wish to God you had been dead in a ditch before a hair of my boy's had been touched. You live, and he lies dying there!"

Cecil bowed in silence; the brutality of the words wounded, but they did not offend him, for he knew his father was in that moment scarce better than a maniac, and he was touched with the haggard misery upon the old Peer's face.

"Out of my sight, sir," re-echoed Lord Royallieu as he strode forward, passion lending vigor to his emaciated frame, while the dignity of his grand carriage blent with the furious force of his infuriated blindness. "If you had had the heart of a man you would have saved such a child as that from his peril; warned him, watched him, succored him at least when he fell. Instead of that, you ride on and leave him to die, if death comes to him! *You* are safe, you are always safe. You try to kill yourself with every vice under heaven, and only get more strength, more grace, more pleasure from it—you are always safe because I hate you. Yes! I hate you, sir!"

No words can give the force, the malignity, the concentrated meaning with which the words were hurled out, as the majestic form of the old Lord towered in the shadow, with his hands outstretched as if in imprecation.

Cecil heard him in silence, doubting if he could hear aright, while the bitter phrases seathed and cut like scourges, but he bowed once more with the manner that was as inseparable from him as his nature.

"Hate is so very exhausting; I regret I give you the trouble of it. *May* ask why you favor me with it?"

"You may!" thundered his father, while his hawk's eyes flashed their glittering fire. "You are like the man I cursed living and curse dead. You look at me with Alan Bertie's eyes, you speak to me with Alan Bertie's voice; I loved your mother, I worshipped her; but—you are his son, not mine!"

The secret doubt, treasured so long, was told at last. The blood flushed Bertie's face a deep and burning scarlet; he started with an irrepressible tremor, like a man struck with

a shot; he felt like one suddenly stabbed in the dark by a sure and a cruel hand. The insult and the amazement of the words seemed to paralyse him for the moment, the next he recovered himself, and lifted his head with as haughty a gesture as his father's; his features were perfectly composed again, and sterner than in all his careless, easy life they ever yet had looked.

"You lie, and you know that you lie. My mother was pure as the angels. Henceforth you can be only to me a slanderer who has dared to taint the one name holy in my sight."

And without another word, he turned and went out of the chamber. Yet, as the door closed, old habit was so strong on him that, even in his hot and bitter pain, and his bewildered sense of sudden outrage, he almost smiled at himself. "It is a mania; he does not know what he says," he thought. "How could I be so melodramatic? We were like two men at the Porte St. Martin. Inflated language is such a bad form!"

But the cruel stroke had not struck the less closely home, and gentle though his nature was, beyond all forgiveness from him was the dishonor of his mother's memory.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER A RICHMOND DINNER.

It was the height of the season, and the duties of the Household were proportionately and insupportably heavy. The Brigades were fairly worked to death, and the Indian service, in the heat of the Afghan war, was never more onerous than the campaigns that claimed the Guards from Derby to Ducal.

Escorts to Levees, guards of honor to Drawing-rooms, or field-days in the Park and the Scrubs, were but the least portion of it. Far more severe, and still less to be shirked, were the morning exercise in the Ride; the daily parade in the Lady's Mile; the reconnoissances from club windows,

the videttes at Flirtation Corner; the long campaigns at mess-breakfasts, with the study of dice and baccarat tactics, and the fortifications of Strasburg pâté against the invasions of Chartreuse and Chambertin; the breathless, steady charges of Belgravian staircases when a fashionable drum beat the rataplan; the skirmishes with sharp-shooters of the bright-armed Irregular Lances; the foraging-duty when fair commanders wanted ices or strawberries at garden parties; the ball-practice at Hornsey Handicaps; the terrible risk of crossing into the enemy's lines, and being made to surrender as prisoners of war at the jails of St. George's, or of St. Paul's Knightsbridge; the constant inspections of the Flying Battalions of the Ballet, and the pickets afterward in the Wood of St. John; the anxieties of the Club commissariats, and the close vigilance over the mess wines; the fatigue duty of ball-rooms, and the continual unharnessing consequent on the clause in the Regulations never to wear the same gloves twice; all these, without counting the close battles of the Corner and the unremitting requirements of the Turf, worked the First Life and the rest of the Brigades, Horse and Foot, so hard and incessantly that some almost thought of changing into the dreary dépôt of St. Stephen's; and one mutinous Coldstreamer was even rash enough and false enough to his colors to meditate deserting to the enemy's camp, and giving himself up at St. George's—"because a fellow once hanged is let alone, you know!"

The Household were very had pressed through the season—a crowded and brilliant one; and Cecil was in request most of all. Bertie, somehow or other, was the fashion—marvellous and indefinable word, that gives a more powerful crown than thrones, blood, beauty, or intellect can ever bestow. And no list was "the thing" without his name, no reception, no garden party, no opera-box, or private concert, or rose-shadowed boudoir, fashionably *affiché* without being visited by him. How he, in especial, had got his reputation it would have been hard to say, unless it were that he dressed a shade more perfectly than any one, and with such inimitable carelessness in the perfection, too, and had an almost unattainable matchlessness in the *sang froid* of his soft, languid insolence, and incredible though ever gentle effrontery. However gained, he had it: and his beautiful hack Sahara, his mail-phaeton with two blood

grays dancing in impatience over the stones, or his little dark-green brougham for night-work, were, one or another of them, always seen from two in the day till four or five in the dawn about the park or the town.

And yet this season, while he made a *prima donna* by a *bravissima*, introduced a new tie by an evening's wear, gave a cook the cordon with his praise, and rendered a fresh invented liqueur the rage by his recommendation, Bertie knew very well that he was ruined.

The breach between his father and himself was irrevocable. He had left Royallieu as soon as his guests had quitted it, and young Berkeley was out of all danger. He had long known he could look for no help from the old lord, or from his elder brother, the heir; and now every chance of it was hopelessly closed; nothing but the whim or the will of those who held his floating paper, and the tradesmen who had his name on their books at compound interest of the heaviest, stood between him and the fatal hour when he must "send in his papers to sell," and be "nowhere" in the great race of life.

He knew that a season, a month, a day, might be the only respite left him, the only pause for him betwixt his glittering luxurious world and the fiat of outlawry and exile. He knew that the Jews might be down on him any night that he sat at the Guards' mess, flirted with foreign princesses, or laughed at the gossamer gossip of the town over iced drinks in the clubs. His liabilities were tremendous, his resources totally exhausted; but such was the latent recklessness of the careless Royallieu blood, and such the languid devil-may-care of his training and his temper, that the knowledge scarcely ever seriously disturbed his enjoyment of the moment. . . Somehow, he never realized it.

If any weatherwise had told the Lisbon people of the coming of the great earthquake, do you think they could have brought themselves to realize that midnight darkness, that yawning desolation which were nigh, while the sun was still so bright and the sea so tranquil, and the bloom so sweet on purple pomegranate and amber grape, and the scarlet of odorous flowers, and the blush of a girl's kiss warmed cheek?

A sentimental metaphor with which to compare the difficulties of a dandy of the Household, because his "stiff" was

floating about in too many directions at too many high figures, and he had hardly enough till next pay-day came round to purchase the bouquets he sent and meet the club-fees that were due! But, after all, may it not well be doubted if a sharp shock and a second's blindness, and a sudden sweep down under the walls of the Cathedral or the waters of the Tagus, were not, on the whole, a quicker and pleasanter mode of extinction than that social earthquake—"gone to the bad with a crash?" And the Lisbonites did not more disbelieve in, and dream less of their coming ruin, than Cecil did his, while he was doing the season, with engagements enough in a night to spread over a month, the best horses in the town, a dozen rose-notes sent to his clubs or his lodgings in a day, and the newest thing in soups, colts, beauties, neckties, perfumes, tobaccos, or square dances, waiting his dictum to become the fashion.

"How you *do* go on with those women, Beauty," growled the Seraph, one day after a morning of fearful hard work consequent on having played the Foot Guards at Lord's, and, in an unwary moment, having allowed himself to be decoyed afterward to a private concert, and very nearly proposed to in consequence, during a Symphony in A; an impending terror from which he could hardly restore himself by puffing Turkish like a steam engine, to assure himself of his jeopardised safety. "You're horribly imprudent!"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined Beauty, serenely. "That is the superior wisdom and beautiful simplicity of making love to your neighbor's wife;—she can't marry you!"

"But she may get you into the D. C.," mused the Seraph, who had gloomy personal recollection of having been twice through that phase of law and life, and of having been enormously mulcted in damages because he was a Duke *in futuro*, and because, as he piteously observed on the occasion, "You couldn't make that fellow Cresswell see that it was *they* ran away with *me* each time!"

"Oh! everybody goes through the D. C. somehow or other," answered Cecil, with philosophy. "It's like the Church, the Commons, and the Gallows, you know—one of the popular Institutions."

"And it's the only Law Court where the robber cuts a better figure than the robbed," laughed the Seraph, consoling himself that he had escaped the future chance of showing in

the latter class of marital defrauded, by shying that proposal during the Symphony in A, on which his thoughts ran, as the thoughts of one who has just escaped from an Alpine crevasse, run on the past abyss in which he has been so nearly lost for ever. "I say, Beauty, were you ever near doing anything serious—asking anybody to marry you, eh? I suppose you have been—they do make such awful hard running on one!" and the poor hunted Seraph stretched his magnificent limbs with the sigh of a martyred innocent.

"I was once—only once!"

"Ah, by Jove! and what saved you?"

The Seraph lifted himself a little, with a sort of pitying sympathizing curiosity toward a fellow-sufferer.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Bertie, with a sigh as of a man who hated long sentences, and who was about to plunge into a painful past. "It's ages ago; day I was at a Drawing-room; year Blue Ruin won the Clearwell for Royal, I think. Wedged up there, in that poking place, I saw *such* a face—the deuce, it almost makes me feel enthusiastic now. She was just out—an angel with a train! She had delicious eyes—like a spaniel's you know—a cheek like this peech, and lips like that strawberry, there, on the top of your ice. She looked at me, and I was in love! I knew who she was—Irish lord's daughter—girl I could have had for the asking; and I vow that I thought I *would* ask her—I actually was as far gone as that, I actually said to myself, I'd hang about her a week or two, and then propose. You'll hardly believe it, but I did! Watched her presented; such grace, such a smile, such a divine lift of the lashes. I was really in love, and with a girl who would marry me! I was never so near a fatal thing in my life——"

"Well?" asked the Seraph, pausing to listen till he let the ice in his sherry-cobbler melt away: when you have been so near breaking your neck down the Matrimonial Matter-horn, it is painful—being to hear how your friend escaped the same risks of descent.

"Well," resumed Bertie, "I was *very* near it. I did nothing but watch her; she saw me, and I felt she was as flattered and as touched as she ought to be. She blushed most enchantingly; just enough, you know; she was conscious I followed her; I contrived to get close to her as she passed out, so close that I could see those exquisite eyes

bread-pan (my mother allowed us to help ourselves sometimes in this free-and-easy way), cut a good-sized piece of Dutch cheese, filled a bottle with milk, and selected six of the largest potatoes which I could find in the sack. I did not forget my pocket-knife, a box of lucifer-matches, an old newspaper for kindling a fire in case the sticks should be damp, and a bag of oats for Bruno's dinner, while Lucy contributed five rosy-cheeked apples that had just fallen from the tree, three lumps of loaf-sugar by way of a little confection after dinner, and a pair of scissors, needles, and thread, in case of any tailoring work being needed. These articles we fastened, in two equal parcels, on either side of Bruno's saddle. We then led him quietly down the shrubbery into the back lane, where we mounted him.

Everything promised favourably: nobody noticed our departure; and Bruno, instead of going through a series of his usual gymnastic performances (for he generally began by standing on his hind legs like a dancing bear, and ended by rolling over and over in the dust like a newly-washed Newfoundland dog)—instead of all this, he trotted off in a most business-like manner, as if determined, for once in his life, to do all he could to please us. The weather was lovely—a warm sun with a cool breeze—and our hearts beat with the most eager anticipation of the pleasures in which we were about to revel. For a long time we met with no adventures, except that when we passed a labourer's cottage the children would point at us and run after us, for it is not every day that you see two such little people riding double; and my sister's bonnet was on the back of her head, and her yellow hair was all streaming in the wind, as she sat with her arm tightly clasped round my waist. But when we had ridden for nearly two hours, and when Bruno was beginning to toss

his head as a hint that he would like to stop, and taste some of the grass that grew at the roadside—just then, at a bend of the lane along which we were travelling, we came up with a tall, thin young man, wearing a pair of frayed knee-breeches and a flowered waistcoat, from the arm-holes of which projected a pair of dingy shirt-sleeves, for he had no coat on his back. He was riding, in a dexterous, unconcerned manner, on the extreme hinder part of a donkey, and guided his steed by the sole aid of a stout ash cudgel. This young man had a keen, sharp-featured face, a pair of brilliant black eyes, and a swarthy complexion. He did not laugh at us, as other people had laughed; his face was perfectly grave, and he touched his ragged fur cap in a respectful manner, saying, as he did so—

“A fine day for a ride, my noble captain and my noble lady.”

From the manner of his speech it was evident that we had entered into a new world. Nobody had hitherto accosted us so courteously. I reined in our palfrey (“palfrey” sounds more romantic than “pony”), for the purpose of acknowledging the young man’s salutation in a becoming manner; and then, while Bruno was busily engaged in making a hearty luncheon from the dainty grasses under the hedge, I inquired how far it might be to Halket Wood.

“You’re at the beginning of Halket Wood now, captain.”

“Are there any blackberries there, sir?” asked my sister, blushing.

“Blackberries, my noble lady! I believe yer. As big,” said the young man, forming his hands into a circle, “as big as—as little apples, and as sweet as sugar-candy. But they ain’t in this part of the wood.”

“Where then?” I asked.

"A bit further in. D'ye see that gap in the 'hedge, captain?"

"Yes."

"Go through that gap for half a mile or so, and you'll come to where there's thousands—ay, millions. Shall I show you the way?"

"I should think you so kind if you would," cried Lucy.

At these words the young man bestowed a tremendous thwack on his donkey's leathern sides, shouted "Gee hup, Neddy," and then led the way into the wood. Bruno followed, but in a very perverse temper. He was angry because he had been disturbed in his luncheon, and he revenged himself on us, by pretending to be excessively nervous, shying at all sorts of objects, and taking an especial dislike to trees, which, in the middle of a wood, was rather an inconvenient prejudice. At length, by means of a remarkably sudden and violent "shy," ingeniously complicated with a sort of circular "buck," he managed to unseat both his riders. I flew right over his head, and escaped without the slightest injury. Poor Lucy was thrown into a furze-bush, and received several scratches which brought the tears into her eyes, though she bore the pain manfully. As for that rascal Bruno, he was so delighted with the mischief he had done that he stood for several seconds stock still, with a cunning look in his eyes, as much as to say, "Now, then, Brother Stephen, catch me if you can." But the dexterous young man was too quick for him. He urged Neddy into a canter, and before Bruno knew what he meant to be at, had cleverly caught the reins on the end of his cudgel. He then gathered the reins together in his hand, and, raising his formidable stick, administered such a dressing to our naughty self-willed brother as he had never received in all his life before; "whack—whack—whack,"

went the stick: Bruno kicked, and plunged, and reared; the donkey and he spun round in a circle; still the young man kept his seat and banged away without moving a muscle of his countenance. But I could not bear to see Bruno, whom we regarded as a blood relation, treated so cruelly. The tears came into my eyes, and I stammered out—

“Please, sir, don’t beat poor Bruno any more.”

“I won’t,” returned the young man, lowering his stick. “I’ve given him a lesson—such a lesson as he won’t forget in a hurry. Ah! would yer?” he exclaimed, as Bruno made one last faint attempt at resistance. “He was a good pony to begin with, but he’s worth ten pound more now than he was when he came into this here wood. A babby will be able to ride him after this. I hope my noble lady hasn’t hurt herself?” continued the young man politely, as he turned towards Lucy.

“The prickles have hurt me,” answered Lucy, as she dried her eyes. “But I don’t mind them now. How far is it, sir, to the blackberries?”

“Not many minutes’ walk,” said the young man. “It’s rayther a scrubby place; there’s thorns and such-like as high as my head; so we’d best tie the pony and the donkey up here, and travel on foot.”

I agreed to this reasonable proposition. While we were securing the animals, the young man examined our saddlebags with some curiosity. “May I take the liberty, my noble captain,” he said respectfully, “of hasking what you’ve got in these here bags?”

“Oh! all sorts of nice things,” exclaimed Lucy eagerly. “There’s bread and cheese, and potatoes, which Steve and I are going to roast, and there’s some apples out of our own garden—please take one, sir,—and there are some beautiful lumps of sugar.”

"And this," said I, determined not to let Lucy have all the talk to herself, "is my new knife with a corkscrew and a gimlet in it, which uncle gave me on my last birthday, and this is Bruno's dinner," pointing to the oats.

The young man muttered something which sounded like "Pore little innocents!" but I did not understand what he meant by it at the time, nor did I understand why he advised that the oats and the pocket-knife should be left suspended to Bruno's saddle, while the rest of the provisions were to be carried with us on foot.

I bestowed a farewell pat on Bruno's plump shoulder, and Lucy very forgivingly put her arms round his neck, and kissed his black nose. We then followed the young man through the underwood, which every moment grew denser and denser, so that in a few minutes both Bruno and Neddy were hidden from our view. Suddenly the young man stopped, and felt carefully in all his pockets. "Lawk!" he observed, "what a stoopid I am! I've been and dropped my bacca-pouch alongside of my donkey. Wait here, my noble captain and my noble lady, while I fetch it."

"You'll come back, sir?" asked Lucy, anxiously.

"Come back? Ay, in half a jiffy." With these words the young man strode swiftly away.

"Oh! Stephen," exclaimed Lucy, "what a lovely lizard!"

Both of us instantly gave chase to the lithe and elegant golden-brown creature, as it darted swiftly across the green-sward. We pursued it for some distance, till it disappeared in a furze-bush. I spent a minute or two in vainly trying to dig it out with a piece of stick, as I had left my pocket-knife behind.

"Stephen! I hear the sound of horses' feet!" cried Lucy. "Let us climb to the top of this hillock, and see who it can be."

Both Lucy and I had been oppressed all the morning with a consciousness that we might possibly be pursued, and as soon as my sister spoke, my guilty imagination summoned up a picture of my father tearing along on top of the butcher's raw-boned white horse. But as soon as we had mounted the hillock, which was high enough to command a tolerably extensive prospect, an entirely different scene met our astonished eyes. We saw our polite friend the tall young man, after having carefully tied Bruno and Neddy together, vault nimbly on the back of the former. He then administered a smart blow with his cudgel and rode coolly away, thus carrying off both animals at once. Presently they disappeared among the thick underwood.

"He has taken away Bruno!" whispered Lucy, her great blue eyes filling with tears, as she convulsively clasped my hand. "Oh, Stephen, what are we to do!"

This was a question more easily asked than answered, so that I remained silent, straining my eyes in hopes of obtaining one farewell glimpse of our departing favourite. A few moments later the whole cavalcade emerged into view on a rising piece of ground. Bruno seemed to be journeying onwards in the most contented manner—I hated him for being so accommodating—but Neddy was trying to hold back, and was in consequence receiving a shower of merciless blows from his master. Little, however, did we understand the depth of hypocrisy which lurked in the bosom of our four-footed brother. Just as his new master was leaning over from the saddle for the purpose of belabouring his long-eared slave more effectually, Bruno sprang into the air as if he were a Pegasus on his way to the Elysian Fields; at the same moment he ducked his head between his forelegs, and twisted his body as cleverly as if he had been a fish. I don't think any horseman could have kept his seat



"Bruno started off like lightning, dragging with him the sluggish ass."

under such an ingeniously complicated buck-jump. The tall young man flew up in the air, all legs and wings, like a heron, while Bruno started off like lightning, dragging with him the sluggish ass, *bon gré, mal gré, nolens, volens*, whether he willed it or no. Presently we saw the thievish young man (our eyes were now opened to his villainy) rise slowly to his feet, with a doleful look on his face, and go limping after them. He had evidently no chance of catching them.

“Oh! don’t I love Bruno!” whispered Lucy, smiling a triumphant smile in the midst of her tears and terror.

As for myself, I longed to clap my hands for joy at the young man’s defeat, but was afraid to do so for fear that in his wrath and disappointment he should come back and murder us. In any case I felt pretty certain that as soon as he gave up the pony for lost he would come back, and look for the pony’s owners; so I said to my sister—

“Quick, Lucy, let us get away from here, and hide ourselves deeper in the wood.”

We felt rather lonely and dispirited, as we carefully gathered up our provisions, and wandered along together, hand in hand, treading as lightly as possible, lest our footsteps should leave any traces behind them. We were in mortal terror of the tall young man; for we did not then understand that, though a thief and a vagabond, he had some sparks of humanity in his breast, as was evinced by his stealing the pony, the bag of oats, and the pocket-knife, but purposely leaving behind for our benefit our precious little stock of provisions, lest we should be starved in the wood.

It was now past mid-day; the heat of the sun became very oppressive, and the thickness of the undergrowth prevented the breeze from reaching us. Lucy grew pale, and began to drag her feet wearily along.

"I'm so hungry," she said. "Let us sit down and have dinner."

So we sat down, and made a hearty meal on bread, cheese, and milk. We looked anxiously round for blackberries, in order that we might be able to spare the rest of our provisions, but none were to be seen; so we made a frugal dessert on a single apple, taking alternate bites from it, and two lumps of sugar. Lucy then laid down her head on a soft mossy bank, and in two minutes was fast asleep. I could not go to sleep so easily. I was the commander-in-chief of the expedition, responsible for its success. We had already suffered a severe loss; our cavalry and part of our provender had been captured by a treacherous enemy; and if I did not bring my troops safely home (meaning myself and Lucy), what would mamma say? Besides, my mind was agitated by another important consideration. We had six raw potatoes in our possession, which must be cooked before they could be eaten. Should they be cooked now, or kept for a future emergency? for I regarded our return home as an affair which was not likely to be managed in less than a couple of days. There was something to be said on both sides. If the potatoes were cooked now, they would not taste as nice as if they were cooked just before being eaten. But, on the other hand, that bloodthirsty young man, who, I felt sure, was scouring the woods in order to discover us, would be less likely to see the fire during broad daylight than if I put off lighting it till after dark.

. At one moment I had some idea of making my fire with charcoal, as Robinson Crusoe did, for a similar reason; but then I remembered that I must first manufacture my charcoal, and that I could not prepare it without causing smoke. At length I decided that I would take time by the forelock, roast my potatoes at once, and that Lucy would be refreshed

and ready to start by the time they were cooked. So I lighted my fire ; but as the sticks which I had gathered were damp, they only smouldered, producing a suffocating smoke, which blew into my little sister's face and woke her up. She started from her mossy pillow in a state of great alarm, crying out, " Mamma ! mamma ! the bed-curtains are on fire !" nor were her fears much appeased when she perceived how late it was growing.

" Steve," she said, " we must begin walking at once, or we shall never get home to-night."

As I had already made up my mind for a bivouac, I gave her no answer.

" Steve," continued Lucy, looking me wistfully in the face, " don't you think dear old Bruno will come back to fetch us ?"

" I think he would if he could, Lucy," I replied ; " but then, you see, he is tied to that horrid old donkey."

At these words Lucy shed tears. We then carefully gathered up the fragments of our provisions, and trotted away, as we believed, in the direction of the lane from which we had first entered the wood. We walked for a long time ; Lucy began to get very tired, and complained of thirst. There was still half a cupful of milk in the bottle, some of which I wished to keep ; but her thirst got the better of her powers of self-restraint, and she drank it all. I felt very thirsty too ; but I thought I had better say nothing about it, so I followed the advice which I had once heard my father give, and putting a round pebble into my mouth, sucked it vigorously.

Once more, after a short rest, from which we were both very loth to rise, we again started on our journey. Suddenly Lucy cried joyfully, " Blackberries !" At this word I lifted my eyes, which until now I had kept steadily fixed on

the path before me, and perceived that there were plenty of blackberries on all sides. In spite of his roguery in the matter of Bruno, the tall young man had not altogether deceived us. There was an abundance of blackberries, and they were not like the little hard, dusty wooden things which we were accustomed to gather in the hedges near our own home; they were big, juicy, and perfectly ripe. In five minutes we had forgotten all our calamities. We did not trouble ourselves with the loss of Bruno, or where we should sleep that night; we did not even remember that that dark-complexioned young man might suddenly leap out upon us and overcome us: we only thought of blackberries, and we did not cease from feasting till our fingers and lips were stained purple. Then Lucy quietly laid herself down on the grass, and dosed off to sleep. I am sorry to say that, though commander-in-chief of the expedition, I followed her example on this occasion, being quite tired out. I cannot tell how long we slept. When I awoke it was quite dark; my legs were numb and stiff, and Lucy was moaning fretfully, "Mamma, please tuck me in; I'm so cold."

As it seemed now pretty evident that we must stay where we were until daylight, I determined to light a fire—a jolly, big, roaring fire, without minding what the dark-complexioned young man, or anybody else, might say to it. But just then I heard a voice which made my blood run cold—a terribly hoarse, harsh voice, which nevertheless spoke in a rough, guilty whisper, as if it were ashamed of itself. It said, "Come, Bill, don't be all night with them snares." Another voice, if anything still rougher and ruder, growled out some reply which I could not catch; and then two great burly figures, which loomed in the darkness like giants, tramped past me. I partly believed

that they were giants—man-eating giants, perhaps—and that they were setting snares to catch such helpless creatures as Lucy and me. Now, in all the story-books giants are represented as possessing a keen sense of smell, and I momentarily expected to hear one of them say, “Faw, fee, fo, fum ! I smell the blood of Stephen and Lucy Scudamore.” Happily they did not smell me out ; but one of them trod on my foot as he passed. I did not cry out ; I don’t think I should have cried if he had crushed it, I was so frightened. I was very thankful that Lucy still slept, though she moaned and turned uneasily in her sleep ; for the sight of these monstrous figures, and the sound of their harsh voices, would have startled her out of her senses.

As soon as the last faint echo of their footsteps had died away, I stooped and kissed Lucy to give her courage, and make her think it was mother ; then I took her in my arms, for she was shivering with cold, and bade her wake up, for that we must start afresh upon our journey.

“ I don’t want to walk any more,” she said, peevishly ; “ I want to stay in bed ; but Nancy’s taken away all my clothes ; and oh ! ” she added, while her teeth chattered, “ I’m so cold ! ”

At last I got her on her feet, and then, with tremulous, uncertain steps, we began to grope our way through the darkness, still clinging prudently to the remains of our provisions. Suddenly, as we turned a corner among some very thick bushes, I heard the sound of whispering voices. The next moment a bright, dazzling, bewildering light flashed in my face, a hand seized me roughly by the collar, and a voice said—

“ Hollo ! what are you doing here ? ”

“ Some of the poachers’ young ’uns, I reckon,” observed another man. “ See here, she’s carrying snares.”

He made a snatch at Lucy's bag, and out rolled our half-dozen potatoes.

"Taters, eh? with a brace of birds for a relish, I suppose," said the second speaker. "Now, then, young shaver, tell us who ye be, and what you're doing here at this time of night."

"Please, sir," I answered, "let me first gather up my provisions. They are all we have to depend on till we get out of this terrible wood."

"Provisions, eh?" said the first man. "What a rum little cove it is! I say, Tom, he looks like a young genelman."

"Don't you be too cocksure, Sam Watkins. Here's a box of matches on him; now, that don't look over-respectable at this time of night. D'ye forget the tramp we found under the hay-rick? You take and lock 'em up in the barn till daylight. Sarch 'em strictly fust, to see they've got no loose matches in their pockets, and jine me again as quick as you can up at the Long Copse; for I don't care to tackle these thundering scoundrels single-handed."

Mr. Watkins was a much pleasanter-spoken man than his comrade, Tom Hawkes. As soon as the latter had departed, he turned his dark lantern upon Lucy's face, muttering to himself—

"Pooty little girl! Gone off to sleep, I do declare. She must be dead beat. I'll carry her, and you run alongside of me, young master."

Before we reached the barn, Mr. Watkins had drawn from me the whole of our eventful history. He laughed heartily over the story of Bruno and the dark-complexioned young man.

"That was a gipsy, young master," he said—"one of the Romany people, as they call themselves. I knows him

well. He pretends to get his living by making birch-brooms and washerwomen's clothes-pegs ; but he's fonder of taking a hen from the roost, or a piece of linen from the hedge, than of doing a stroke of honest work. Now, if I could have my own way, I should take you two children, especially this pooty little girl, down to my cottage.. I should rouse my old woman out of bed, make her light the fire, and give you a good supper and a warm bed ; but I'm only second in command here, d'ye see. Orders must be obeyed, or Tom Hawkes will be ready to wring my neck ; so I must e'en lock ye up in the barn. But it's nice and warm ; there's plenty of clean straw ; and I'll come back and see ye as soon as ever I can."

Seeing that Mr. Watkins was so good-natured, I ventured to ask him one question before he departed on his errand. I asked it in a tone of breathless eagerness.

"Are there any giants here?"

"Giants? There was one in the show at fair time."

"But are there any in the wood?"

"In the wood? What d'ye mean?"

"Two monstrous figures passed close by us," said I, in a whisper, for I did not want Lucy to hear me. "They were talking of the snares they meant to set."

"Eh! were they?" exclaimed Mr. Watkins, sharply ; "I wish you'd told me this before, young chap. I must be off like a shot. Good night." And he departed hurriedly, banging and double-locking the barn-door after him.

In some respects the barn was preferable to Halket Wood, for it was warm and dry, and contained plenty of bed-clothing, in the shape of hay and straw. But in the wood we were free to go where we pleased ; and now we were prisoners, locked and bolted in, and I trembled to

think what our fate might be in the morning. Mr. Watkins was evidently a kind-hearted man, but he was only Mr. Hawkes's lieutenant, and even if Mr. Hawkes were moved by our entreaties, was there not a stony-hearted baronet—Sir Jocelyn Trafford by name—to whom Mr. Watkins had darkly alluded, who was the lord of Halket Wood, and much of the surrounding territory, and who, being a justice of the peace, would, as soon as he had finished his breakfast, in all probability summon us before him, and sentence us to imprisonment in two solitary cells, where we should be left alone in the damp darkness, in company with a porringer of water, a brown loaf, half a dozen horribly tame toads, and an army of inquisitive rats.

The barn was oppressively dark, except at the upper end, near the roof, where a ray of moonlight streamed in through a loft-door, which had been imperfectly fastened, and shed a faint illumination over the floor of the loft. Lucy and I at first sat cowering in the thick darkness of that part of the barn where Mr. Watkins had left us, unable even to discern each other's faces; but as soon as we had recovered from our first feelings of surprise, we crept instinctively towards the light. I made Lucy as comfortable a bed as I could among the trusses of hay, and then began to look about me to discover some means of escape. When my eyes had become gradually accustomed to the dim light, I perceived objects which had before been entirely invisible. I now saw that there was a ladder, placed almost perpendicularly, which led up to the loft floor, and that, if once there, nothing would be easier than to open the loft-door, which stood ajar, and jump down. It was true that the jump would be about twelve feet in depth, but then there was generally a dung-heap underneath a loft, and if so, I would jump on to it. But how about Lucy? I fancied she would

not dare to jump so far, and I could not leave her alone in the barn.

Reflecting over all these difficulties, I climbed the ladder. Just as my head had come upon a level with the loft-floor I heard a slight noise, which made me pause. The noise was made by an enormous rat, nearly as big as a young rabbit. He was stealthily crossing the loft-floor with an ear of new corn in his mouth, and as he came into the narrow ray of moonlight, he was so close to me that I could see his great whiskers and his cunning bright eyes. Just then I chanced to look upwards, and saw something that made me forget all about the rat. A monstrous pair of round fiery eyes were glaring at me. I had seen our pussy-cat's eyes shining in the coal-cellar, but these were no cat's eyes. I was just wondering whether they could be the eyes of one of the scaly dragons of which I had read, when in a moment I heard a terrible whirr of wings, and the eyes seemed to rush at me. I threw myself backwards off the ladder, and fortunately fell into a truss of hay. I found my sister broad awake, staring up into the loft. When she had made sure that I had broken no bones, and was none the worse for my tumble, she asked me what made me fall down.

"I threw myself down," I answered, "to escape the dragon."

"It didn't look like a dragon," answered Lucy gravely. "It looked like a bird with a pussy-cat's face, and it ate up a great mouse."

Here a light broke in upon me. "Oh, Lucy," I said, "what a silly I've been! It was only an old owl. I shall go up again. But what's this on the ground? It feels like a snake."

"It was something that came down with you, Steve, when you fell."

I carried it cautiously up the ladder in order that I might examine it in the moonlight. It was a fine, stout piece of cord, some twelve or fourteen feet long.

"Lucy," I cried triumphantly, "we can escape! I have found a rope."

I saw nothing of my friend the owl this time. I suspect he had got into some snug cranny among the rafters, and was there picking the bones of that unlucky gentleman in a brown coat and long whiskers, whose mouth I had seen filled with stolen property. I pushed open the loft-door. The moon was not shining so brightly as before, for she was near upon setting, but the day was beginning to dawn in the east. Nothing could be more conveniently arranged for an escape. Underneath the loft-door was a large heap of straw, which had been recently used for horses' bedding, and so clean that the daintiest lady would not mind jumping into it. I found an iron staple in the wall of the barn, to which I determined to fix my cord, and I then made knots at intervals of eighteen inches, to prevent the climber from slipping. My hands were neither very big nor very strong in those days, and I found the knot-making painful and difficult work, but I feared, if I did not make them, that Lucy, who, though active and nimble enough, was less used to climbing than I was, would never be able to come down.

At last my task was completed. I summoned Lucy into the loft, and we tugged at the staple with our united strength to make sure that it would hold. Then I began to descend, Lucy looking on from above with an anxious face. The cord waggled about a good deal, and I felt rather nervous, but I presently reached the ground, or rather the straw heap, safely. Lucy came down in famous style, no boy could have come down better; but she cer-

tainly had this advantage over me, that I steadied the lower end of the rope for her.

But now that we had got safely down what were we to do next? There we were in the grey dawn of early morning, in the stable-yard of a great big house, whose red brick walls we could see peeping through the leaves of the elm-trees. The sparrows in the eaves were just beginning to twitter feebly; two or three cocks were crowing lustily in chorus; a solitary duck, determined to earn her breakfast before her neighbours, was waddling along the gutters, diligently searching for worms; but all the human beings of the mansion were still apparently buried in sleep. Lucy and I felt inclined to yawn and shiver when we came out into the cold twilight; but as we had no time to lose, if we wished to make our escape unobserved, we joined hands, and, quickly crossing the stable-yard, opened a gate which led into the back premises of the great house. On perceiving where we had got to, we were on the point of turning back, when Lucy's attention was attracted by the sight of a half-open window, in which great bowls of cream and milk were visible. It was the window of the dairy. We could not resist feasting our eyes on so luscious a sight, so we drew near and peeped in at the window. I could easily have put in my hand, and dipped it into one of the cream-bowls, but a great snow-white tom-cat lay curled up in the window, and, though he gazed at us with a pair of lazy, good-humoured eyes, I did not feel sure that he would let us touch his master's milk. But listen to the dialogue that took place between me and my sister.

"Oh," says Lucy, "how I should like to have some of that milk! You could reach it, Steve, couldn't you?"

"Yes; but Tom would not like us to take it, would you, Tom?"

Tom's lazy eyes said, "I don't care what you do," as plain as they could speak ; but Lucy cried indignantly—

"I believe Tom is a great thief himself, and has no business here. See, his whiskers are all over cream. Let me put my hand in, Steve, and take a little."

"No, Lucy," I said, "I don't think we should imitate Tom's naughty ways. He is only a cat, and thinks there is nothing in the world so good as milk, except perhaps cream."

"And what can be better than cream when you are thirsty?" says that silly Lucy.

"Why, doing what you don't like to do, Lucy, because it is right."

The colour came into my sister's cheeks, and a tear stood in her eye. I had taken her by the hand, and was about to lead her gently away, when I heard something which made my heart jump right into my mouth. A soft but manly voice speaking close in my ear said—

"Supposing I were to help you to some milk, my little friends?"

Of course Lucy and I turned our heads sharply round. As soon as we had done so, we saw a tall portly gentleman, with greyish-black hair, wearing a felt hat and gaiters, and carrying a gold-headed cane in his hand. His gaiters were splashed with mud, and he had a comforter muffled about his throat to guard him from the keen morning air. We stood staring at this gentleman, with our mouths open, without daring to make any reply.

"Tell me," he repeated, "would you like some milk?"

"If you please, sir," we both answered, in a very low tone.

"Then be good enough to follow me."

It seemed so strange of him to ask little animals like us

to be good enough to follow him ; but I have since learnt that it was part of his habitual politeness.

He led us into a snug room not far from the dairy, first knocking at the door and receiving permission to enter. In this room a cheerful fire was burning, and a neat old lady, whom we presently discovered to be the housekeeper, was busy making tea. On the table there were delightfully thin slices of bread and butter, both brown and white, and a plate of ham sandwiches. The old lady looked extremely surprised at our entrance ; but the gentleman held up his hand in a significant manner, as though he would entreat her to say nothing, and then bade us sit down by the fire. Presently he handed each of us a cup of tea, and placed the sandwiches and the bread and butter on a chair between us. We thanked him heartily, and then fell to eating and drinking. I have since drunk many cups of tea ; but I have never enjoyed any more than that cup in the housekeeper's room at Halket Hall.

• The gentleman then took a cup of tea himself and began to talk to the housekeeper.

“Well, Mrs. Reynolds, you'll be glad to hear that we've caught those two vagabonds, after a four hours' hunt.”

“Indeed, sir ?”

“Yes. They're poachers, of course : we found three brace of birds and a hare on them ; but I suspect they were meditating something worse than poaching ; for they had with them a complete set of housebreaker's tools.”

Mrs. Reynolds held up her hands in astonishment.

“These children,” continued the gentleman, turning sharply round, and looking at us, “were the means of putting us on the right scent. They told Watkins where they had seen the poachers.”

So they were not giants, after all ! I confess that I felt a little disappointed.

"And may I venture to ask, Sir Jocelyn, who these children are ? Whoever they are, they want washing and cleaning sadly," said the housekeeper.

Sir Jocelyn ! "So this pleasant-spoken, hospitable gentleman was the baronet of whom I had stood in such dreadful awe.

"As soon as the house is up, Mrs. Reynolds," answered the baronet, "one of the maids must give these children a bath, and then perhaps they'll tell you their own tale at full length. At present I've only heard a second-hand version from Watkins."

Sir Jocelyn then gave a short history of our adventures, laughing a good deal as he told it, and causing Mrs. Reynolds to exclaim every few minutes, "My goodness gracious ; did ever one hear of such venture-someness ?"

"But you haven't heard the finish yet," continued the baronet. "Watkins told me he had locked the children into the barn. I hurried home with the charitable intention of letting them out, and I had just put my head into the stable-yard, when I saw a scene which didn't look like reality, but rather like something out of a stage-play. This gallant young gentleman was standing on a heap of straw, steadying a rope which he had fastened to the wall of the barn, while this little lady skilfully climbed down, hand over hand, just as if she had been a foretop-man. It reminded me of my midshipman days. And now, my boy and girl, what are your names ?"

"Stephen and Lucy Scudamore," we answered.

"There is an author named Stephen Scudamore," observed Sir Jocelyn, meditatively.

"I think he is our papa, sir," said Lucy, timidly. "Papa is always reading and writing."

"Dear me! dear me!" cried the baronet, "to think of such a recluse as Scudamore, who never seems at his ease except among his books—to think of his being the father of such a pair of reckless little adventurers! Well, my children, I must leave you for the present in Mrs. Reynolds's hands. We must lose no time. Poor Scudamore will be distracted. As soon as I've refreshed myself with a bath and change of dress, I'll drive them home. You'll be kind enough to have the children attended to, Mrs. Reynolds, and will you also ask Nichols to have the dog-cart ready in an hour's time?"

After we had been washed and dressed, both Lucy and I felt very comfortable, but very sleepy, and we nodded and dozed nearly all the way home, so that Sir Jocelyn, who was inclined to be talkative, did not find us very entertaining companions. When the dog-cart drew up at our gate, before Nichols, the groom, had time to jump down and ring the bell, my mother rushed out with a great cry of joy, and folded us in her arms. She then turned quite white, and would have fainted away if Nancy had not caught her. No wonder my mother was tired, for she had been out searching for us till midnight, had started again as soon as it was daylight, and had only just come home. As for my poor father, he was so upset that he was quite useless, and my mother, just by way of keeping him quiet, had sent him into London to get handbills printed describing our dress and looks, and to order an advertisement to be put in the *Times* newspaper.

As soon as my mother had recovered her excess of joy, and had ceased to pour out her thanks to Sir Jocelyn for his exceeding kindness, we ventured to ask a question.

"Has Bruno come home?"

My mother answered, with a smile, "Come and see."

She led the way to the stable, Sir Jocelyn Trafford accompanying us. There stood dear old Bruno contentedly munching his hay, as if nothing particular had happened. However he pricked up his ears when we rushed up to him, and began to kiss him and hug him, so that I really think he was pleased to see us back again.

"Now look into the other stall," said my mother, "and tell me, if you can, how that long-eared creature came here."

We looked into the other stall, and saw the tall young man's donkey crunching some oats, and looking as calm and resigned as if he had lived there all his life. That faithful Bruno had dragged him all the way to our stable-door. We explained to my mother how the two came to be tied together.

"That good Bruno," said I, "has brought home everything safe. Nothing is missing, not even my pocket-knife."

"We may keep the donkey, mayn't we, mamma?" cried Lucy. "Let us give him a new name. Shall we call him Gipsy?"

"Well, my love, I can't decide about that; but—dear me! good gracious! here's your papa!"

My worthy father entered the stable with his spectacles on his nose, and that dreamy look in his eyes which I remember so well. He held a piece of paper in his hand.

"My dear Margaret," he began very gravely, "I just want to read you the rough draft of the handbill. I've bestowed a good deal of pains on its composition, and I hope you'll approve of it——. Why, bless me!——"

In another moment both his truant children were kissing him.

I have nothing more to add concerning our adventures in Halket Wood, except to say the swarthy-complexioned young man never came to reclaim Gipsy, who remained for many years a faithful servant of the Scudamore family.





CHAPTER II.

I go to School at Harlington—My first Sight of the Sea—The Burning Ship—Lempriere House—Boating and Bathing—Searching for Gold in Ben Lawers—Manthorpe's Practical Lecture—A Change in my Career—Farewell to old Bagshot's—Preparing for Liverpool.

UP to this time I had been to no school, not even to a day-school, and I had obtained the little book learning which I possessed from the instruction imparted by my father and my mother. I cannot truthfully say that either of them was a very good teacher. My father was wonderfully gentle and patient ; but he did not possess the invaluable art of explanation, and he was apt, if the subject interested him, to wander off into regions that were far beyond my reach. My mother, on the other hand, was quick-tempered, and easily wearied by dulness and inattention, besides which she was liable to all sorts of domestic interruptions. Just as she was trying to drive into Lucy's head, for example, the difference between a peninsula and an island, Matthew Wise, the gardener, would put his grizzled head in at the door to say that he had set all the cabbage plants, and would mistress come and look at the bed. Then as soon as she had settled with old Matthew, Nancy would summon my mother into the kitchen for the purpose of discovering what was amiss with the

oven, and when she got back into the school-room, after half an hour's absence, she would probably find me and Lucy building a Tower of Babel with our box of bricks, instead of minding our lesson-books.

I suppose my father and mother put their heads together, and decided that they were neither of them fitted for teaching their children. So when I was about ten years old, it was settled that Lucy should become a day scholar at the Misses Wells's Select Establishment for Young Ladies, and that I should go to school in the neighbourhood of a seaport town on the south coast. I felt it very hard to part with Lucy, for we had been inseparable playmates ever since we were babies, my elder brothers being too old to consort with me, and we promised to write to each other every other day, which promise we faithfully carried out for the space of one week. At the end of that time I had become less home-sick than I was at first, and had begun to discover such attractions in prisoners' base and peg in the ring, that I did not think about my dear little sister above six times a day; while as for Lucy herself, she discovered a bosom friend at the Misses Wells's Academy, named Clara Ainslie. My mother wrote to tell me that the two girls walked through the village with their arms twined round each other's necks, that Lucy was never easy unless she was having tea with her darling Clara, or her darling Clara were having tea with her, and that, in short, my capricious sister was quite reconciled to the loss of my society.

Until I went to school I had never seen the sea, or indeed any considerable sheet of water. I knew something about ships; for I had been several times on the Thames between London and Gravesend; but I had no conception of that appearance of infinity which is conveyed

by the meeting of an illimitable extent of sky and water. My father was a man of a poetical turn of mind, and he was desirous that my first sight of the sea should make such a powerful impression on me that I should never forget it all the rest of my life. With this end in view, he determined, if possible, I should not catch any passing glimpses of the sea from the railway carriage, but that I should see it suddenly all at once in its full majesty. Considering that in most worldly things my worthy father was such a child-like, dreamy man, I think that he managed his innocent little device very cleverly. My first sight of the sea has left an impression on my mind which will never be effaced, though, as the reader will presently perceive, my father little knew how strange a scene he was about to show me.

As we approached Harlington, the town where Dr. Bagshot's school was situated, several passing views of the sea were visible ; but my father sedulously bade me keep my eyes closed, and even gravely tied a pocket-handkerchief over them, to the amusement and surprise of our fellow-passengers. It was now getting towards the evening of a long and beautiful summer's day. We took a fly and drove to the Golden Anchor Hotel, my father bidding the coachman be careful not to let us get a sight of the sea if he could possibly help it. The man stared, but touched his hat civilly, saying if that was the gentleman's wish, he would take him a road by by-lanes and back ways, from which not an inch of salt water would be visible. But though my good father made me shut my eyes, he did not bid me shut my nostrils, and I drew in such unmistakable whiffs of sea air, though somewhat defiled with the rank odours of tar and decayed fish, that my imagination, which is greatly stimulated by the nose—for the seat of memory seems to

be situated near that organ—began at once to revel in all the maritime stories I had ever read, of ships beleaguered and crushed among mighty bergs of Arctic ice, or becalmed on the glassy waters of the tropics, of cocoa-nut groves growing* with their roots in the sea, and of ugly sharks showing their backs in the transparent shallows. Busy with these fancies, I presently found myself at the Golden Anchor Hotel, where my father ordered dinner, and then fell into conversation with a one-armed porter who stood in the hall.

"I want this young gentleman's boxes carried to Dr. Bagshot's."

"Very well, sir; I'll put 'em on my truck at once."

"But we won't go there ourselves till the evening. My boy has never seen the sea. I want him to see it to the best advantage."

"You've come at the wrong time of year for that, sir. We don't often lash our tail in the summer time. In November, young gentleman, you'll sometimes have the salt spray a-dashing in at your garret-windows. But the sea will look pretty to-night, if the weather holds fine. Let me see, the moon rises, sir, half an hour after sunset."

"That will be the time," said my father; "you must come with us, and show us the way to Lempriere House afterwards."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You've been a sailor, I perceive," said my father.

"For more than forty years, sir."

"Did the French shoot off your arm?" I asked, laying my hand on the old man's empty sleeve.

"No, young gentleman, they didn't," he answered, rather sharply. "I've been in two actions agin the French, and it might have been a feather in my cap to have lost a limb

then ; but I never got a scratch. I was with Lord Exmouth at the bombardment of Algiers. The Algerines, though they're cut-throats and pirates, fought bravely ; a wound from them would have been an honourable wound ; but I never got a scratch. I was at Navarino, when we and the French and the Rooshians went in agin them poor beggars of Turks. There's a good deal of pluck about the Turks ; but I never got a scratch. Last of all, in my old age, I must needs go to China, and there, up a bit of a river that nobody at home ever heard tell of, a cussed fellow in a painted paper cap, looking more like a jack-pudding than a soger, lets fly at me with his matchlock ; the bullet was as rusty as if it had been kept in a marine store shop for a twelvemonth, and I lost my arm. I call that bad luck, young gentleman—uncommon bad luck."

My father and I laughed afterwards over the enthusiasm of the old seaman, who would rather have parted with his precious limb thirty years sooner to a respectable foe like the French than sacrifice it to a set of mountebanks, such as he deemed the Chinese.

Half an hour after sunset, just before it grew dark enough to light the gas, the one-armed veteran summoned us to accompany him to the sea-shore. Once more my father took the precaution of binding a handkerchief over my eyes, causing me thereby to receive a good deal of misplaced compassion from passers-by in the streets. "Look at that poor blind boy," people said, "and his father leading him." The sea scent grew stronger and stronger as we quitted the pavement of the town for the round pebbles of the beach. At each step the wind seemed to blow more salty ; then I perceived that the pebbles became smaller, and gradually changed into loose sand, in which I sank up to my ancles. The long roll of the waves on the shore

was now distinctly within earshot. Presently the loose sand gave way to firm wet sand, showing that the tide had recently risen so far, and then my father bade me stand still while he uncovered my eyes.

I shall not attempt to convey any impression of the delight which I felt in gazing upon this broad expanse of ocean, over which the moon had just begun to shed a column of glittering white rays. I would rather call attention to the conversation which immediately took place between my father and Hardcastle, our one-armed attendant.

"D'ye see that barque, sir?" said the old seaman, pointing to a vessel which lay within two miles of the shore.

My father was very short-sighted, especially about dusk, so he replied hesitatingly, "Yes."

"I've had my eye on her all the way down the beach. There's something wrong aboard. There! d'ye see that?" he exclaimed.

• "Yes, I see it," I answered quickly; "there is a puff of smoke rising up from the deck."

"She's afire, that's what she is!" said Hardcastle. "Hey! you two sleepers!" he continued, hailing a couple of beachmen who were lolling idly against a boat, "d'ye see that?" "There's a job for some of us out yonder."

As he spoke, a tongue of red flame darted into the air, illuminating the spars and rigging of the barque, and enabling us to perceive several black figures on board, hurrying to and fro.

The two beachmen, who were just before the very picture of laziness, now became all life and animation, and in a few moments had their boat launched and ready for sea.

My father, usually so dreamy and indolent, astonished me by saying in an excited voice,—

"You must take me with you, my lads!"

The boatmen answered that space was precious, that every inch of room would be needed by the inmates of the burning ship.

"Lor' bless ye," sneered Mr. Hardcastle, "d'ye think you're the only boat in Harlington? See, there's two more putting out, while you're palavering. There'll be a dozen presently alongside of her."

"I'll give you a couple of guineas," pursued my father, "to take me and my boy with you."

The men still seemed to hesitate. Perhaps they wanted more money, but when my father added that he had been a surgeon, and might be of use on board, they yielded, hastily passed me into the boat, took each an oar, and made over the tiller-ropes to the experienced hand of Hardcastle.

As we drew near the burning vessel the flames shot up higher and higher, the whole sky was illuminated by the glare, and the moonbeams, which just before had played on the waters with such a cold white radiance, now appeared to be tinged with the stains of blood. Our boatmen pulled with a good will, and though several other craft were to be seen putting out from the shore, we were the first to reach the doomed ship. The sea was perfectly calm, almost as calm as the surface of a pond, otherwise I might have been sea-sick, for I had never before set foot in a row-boat. The most adventurous voyage I had ever made was on board of a Gravesend steamer. And yet I think my excitement was too great for sea-sickness. I was unable to utter a word, but I stared with all my eyes, and listened with all my ears to the conversation of my companions.

"It puzzles me why they don't lower a boat," said Hardcastle. "There's two boats aboard, d'ye see?"

"Ay," said one of the boatmen, "there's the long-boat amidships, and the jolly-boat hanging over the poop-bulwarks."

"If they don't look sharp they won't be able to touch the long-boat," said the other oarsman. "See, the flames are leaping up all around her!"

"But what," exclaimed Hardcastle, "possesses 'em not to lower the other boat? They must be stark staring mad."

This dialogue took place while there was still a mile of water between us and the ship. I will now describe, as plainly as I can, what I saw when we drew under her stern. Although I was but a little boy at the time, the scene is indelibly imprinted on my memory. Fortunately there was scarcely any wind. What little wind there was blew from the stern of the barque towards her bows, so that the flames, which had apparently broken out amidships, were drifting forwards. The spars of the mainmast were beginning to take fire, the forecastle was hidden by clouds of suffocating smoke, but the after-part of the vessel was as yet untouched by the conflagration. Crowded together at the extreme end of the poop, and leaning over the taffrail, I saw three agonized faces. They were the faces of three women. One was old, swarthy, and weather-beaten; another was quite young and pretty; the third was as old perhaps as my mother. They were all dressed in black foreign-looking clothes. As soon as we approached, these women burst into wailing cries of entreaty. I could understand nothing that they said, for, as my father afterwards told me, they spoke Spanish, and begged us, for the love of God and all His holy saints, to save them from death.

Our two boatmen clambered speedily on board, accompanied by my father, leaving Hardcastle to take care of the boat and me. Just as they got on board a most dreadful

harrowing cry, the like of which I had never heard before and have never heard since, burst from the fore-part of the vessel. I then perceived, for the first time, a number of long-eared animals struggling violently in a confused mass. A few seconds later a cloud of smoke hid them from view, the cries grew fainter and fainter, and then altogether ceased. The poor creatures had been suffocated or burnt to death.

In a very few minutes the three women were safely lowered into our boat. But, though they clasped the boatman's knees in token of their thankfulness, they did not appear satisfied. They made the most frantic gesticulations, to imply that there were other persons on board. Unfortunately none of our company understood Spanish. My father, being a learned scholar, could read it with some fluency, and made shift to utter a few words, but he could understand nothing that was said in reply. Every instant the flames were mounting higher, the smoke was growing more suffocating, the heat was becoming fiercer. Even where we lay, our faces began to feel as if they were being scorched.

"Where are these other people?" shouted Hardcastle, at the top of his voice, in hopes of making the foreigners understand by dint of loud speaking.

The women pointed towards the forepart of the ship.

Our brave fellows shook their heads. "A salamander," they said, "couldn't venture into such a furnace as that, and come back alive."

"How many are there?" asked Hardcastle, holding up his fingers.

The women held up two fingers in reply.

"Two souls still aboard! Bear a hand here," said the old seaman, "and lay her close alongside. In spite of



"As we drew near the burning vessel, the flames shot up higher and higher, and the whole sky was illuminated by the glare."

my useless daddle, I'll make shift to climb on deck and look for 'em."

He disappeared for a few minutes, and then came to the bulwarks, shouting for assistance.

"Quick ! quick !" he said ; " climb up, all on ye, except the women and the boy ; we shall need all hands to move 'em—a pair of good-for-nothing grog-swilling scoundrels !"

Our people were only just in time, for the flames were creeping stealthily along the poop, and beginning to lay hold of the mizen rigging. Before long a couple of burly figures, dressed in seamen's jackets, and as insensible as if they had been bales of merchandise, were lowered by ropes into the boat, and we then pulled hastily away from the ship.

All that happened after this appeared to me, when I came to try and think over it, like a confused dream. I remember that several other boats came rowing alongside of us, and that their crews asked us for news in loud, eager, and excited voices ; I remember that one of the foreign ladies—I think it was the foreign one—pressed my hand in a compassionate manner, and laid my head on her knee, for I was beginning to feel dreadfully weary ; I remember starting up on seeing an unwonted glare of light, and being just in time to see the mainmast—a mass of red-hot flaming timber—fall crashing over the ship's side ; the next thing that I remember after this is, that I found myself in bed, in a strange room, where a man, who looked like my father, was sitting at the open window watching me with a face of extreme concern, and at the same time comforting himself by an occasional whiff from a porcelain pipe.

It was broad daylight, and I felt considerably astonished—indeed my head was quite giddy and confused. By degrees I remembered that I had come to Harlington for the

purpose of going to school, and that, therefore, this was most likely my bedroom at Lempriere House. I began to doubt whether that man by the window could be my father after all. Perhaps he was the head master.

"Are you Dr. Bagshot, sir?" I asked very earnestly.

"Bless me! I hope the child's brain isn't affected," muttered my father, as he laid down his pipe. "No, my dear boy, it's me, your silly old papa—Stephen Scudamore the elder." And he drew near, and kissed me.

"Then where are we now, papa? At Lempriere House?"

"No, my dear. In a bedroom at the Golden Anchor. You've been rather unwell, Steve. The fact is, somebody believed, like a confounded stupid——" My father's face grew red as he said these words.

"I hope I haven't been stupid, papa?"

"No, no, my dear child, not you. Somebody much bigger and older than you, who ought to have been wiser than he was. Mamma will be very angry with him when she hears of it. But we won't say any more about it now. Drink some of this nice lemonade, and go to sleep again." •••

"Papa," said I, sitting up in my bed, "I don't want to go to sleep again. I don't feel tired, and it's broad daylight. I want to know all about the burning ship, and what became of the three poor ladies."

At these words my father put on a face of the most innocent surprise imaginable. "Burning ship? Ladies? What can you be dreaming of? There now," he said, patting my head, "lie down and sleep for one hour more, and I will meanwhile write out for your amusement the story of a ship that I once saw on fire. When you are quite well, you shall read it."

A few days afterwards I had completely recovered, and was taken to Lempriere House. As my father kissed me at

parting, he placed a small manuscript in my hand, which he bade me read at my leisure. I could not follow his recommendation literally, for I was unable to decipher his handwriting; so I took it to Dr. Bagshot, and asked his advice. Dr. Bagshot glanced over its pages, said it seemed extremely clever, and observed that as it was on a topic in which we were all just then deeply interested, he would, with my permission, read it aloud to the assembled school next Wednesday evening after tea. Fancy a grave and reverend head master, Doctor of Divinity, with three ushers and seventy boys at his beck and call, asking permission of a little chit like me! Of course I granted the permission instantly.

The doctor read my father's composition in a splendidly loud emphatic manner. His power of deciphering such crabbed handwriting seemed to me miraculous. The boys applauded him lustily, and thereupon christened me "The Literary Dustinan," because I was the son of an author. Out of the reams of dry, learned, unreadable treatises which my father has composed during the course of a laborious literary career, this is one of the few which I care to read, because there is some life and human nature in it. He begins by lamenting his own folly:—"With my usual unthinking selfishness," he says, "because a sudden insane curiosity seized me to see a ship on fire close at hand, I must needs take my dear youngest boy Stephen, of the tender age of ten years, in the boat with me. He had never seen the sea till that evening, and the sight of the furious flames and the terror-stricken faces of the women, the roar of the conflagration, and the hideous yells of the dying mules so affected him that he lay for three days after in a sort of stupor. Heaven forgive me! I dared not send for his mother, and, thank God, he is now mending fast, and

she shall not know the tale of his father's folly till he is well and strong again."

I need not repeat the whole of my father's manuscript, from which I have already largely borrowed ; for it is not likely that my childish years, unaccustomed to the sound of *sea phrases*, would have been able to bear away accurately the expressions used by the boatmen and others ; but I will just give a brief outline of the story of this ill-fated vessel.

The *Rosabelle*, a British barque of 370 tons, bound from Cadiz to London, anchored, after a remarkably fine passage, in Harlington Roads for want of wind. There were four passengers on board—namely, Señor Moreno, his wife, daughter, and servant. The señor was a merchant of Cadiz, and was about to settle in London with his family. The *Rosabelle* carried a valuable cargo, consisting of cork, silver ingots, and some mules of the purest Andalusian breed, for which the señor hoped to obtain high prices in England. As there seemed no chance of a breeze arising to carry the ship towards her destination, and as if those days, steam-tugs were not so easily procurable as they are at present, Señor Moreno, who had urgent business in London, determined to proceed thither, accompanied by the captain, leaving the ship in charge of the mate, who was ordered to unloose the sails if the least breeze arose. Now, the mate was a gay fellow, fond of the society of ladies, and he remembered, having once before lain at anchor in Harlington Roads, that there was a very fascinating barmaid at the Golden Anchor Hotel, to whom, on a former occasion, he had paid his addresses. So, making up his mind that the calm would last for at least one day, he ordered the captain's gig to be manned, and went ashore, under pretence of buying some provender for the mules. But the crew

saw through his stratagem, and resolved that, if he went a-pleasuring, they would go a-pleasuring also. They made, therefore, an agreement among themselves that as soon as the mate was safely moored in the bar-parlour of the Golden Anchor, the men who had pulled him to the beach should return on board. They then cast lots to decide which two of the whole number should stay on board to take charge of the ship, after which a spokesman went aft to the ladies, who, poor innocent souls, knew nothing of these cunning contrivances, and informed them, in the best Spanish he could muster, that the mate had ordered all hands ashore, except two, for the purpose of bringing hay on board. The two fellows who were left behind were mightily discontented to think that their comrades were enjoying themselves ashore while they were mewed up on board ship. During the forenoon they had some occupation, for they had to cook their own dinner, and help Señor Moreno's servant to cook the dinner for the ladies; but in the afternoon time began to hang heavily on their hands. They grew tired of pacing up and down the main-deck smoking their pipes; they grew tired of playing cards on the fore-castle; and presently one of them remembered that there was a keg of rum under the main hatchway, which could be easily got at. They determined to take a very small quantity—only a "tot" or two—and accordingly descended into the hold, armed with one of the carpenter's gimlets, a straw, a tin mug, and a lighted candle. They accomplished their theft successfully; but the rum was so deliciously flavoured, and raised their spirits so pleasantly, that they determined to make a second application. This second application led to a third, and that to a fourth, and it was afterwards supposed that, in one of those descents into the hold, one of these fellows, rendered reckless

by the spirit he had drunk, left the lighted candle behind him.

About sunset the ladies perceived, by their unsteady gait, that the men were intoxicated, and became very much alarmed. They were unable, however, to do anything. They dared not interfere with the sailors: so they leant over the bulwarks, straining their eyes in the direction of the shore, in hopes of seeing the mate and the rest of the crew coming off in the captain's gig. When the thin blue smoke first began to curl up from the main hatchway, they ran about the deck, screaming for assistance from the drunken sailors, but could find them nowhere. Hardcastle afterwards discovered the two rascals fast asleep and uninjured under a wet sail, with a can of rum by their side.

It is often said that there is a special providence which watches over drunken men. If this sail had not happened to be saturated with wet, these tipsy revellers would probably have been burnt to death. But how came the sail to be wet in such calm, dry weather? It seems, from the statement which they afterwards made, that these fellows, finding that they were rapidly becoming intoxicated, endeavoured to restore themselves to sobriety by emptying buckets of water on each other's heads, and that, in their clumsy efforts to accomplish this, they drenched the sail and everything about them; so that, in a certain way, one of the consequences of their drunken freak was the means of saving their lives.

Such was the end of an adventure which might have proved a terrible tragedy; but which, fortunately, cost no lives except those of the poor mules. A good deal of the silver, though melted entirely out of its original shape, was afterwards recovered by divers.

I spent four very happy years at Lempriere House; but

I shall not trouble the reader with any lengthened account of them, as the incidents which happened to me were very much the same sort of incidents which happen to most healthy boys who are fond of all sorts of out-door amusements, but are not, at the same time, too idle to learn their lessons. Before I was fourteen I had become a fair classical scholar, was well up in the Georgics of Virgil, and could translate a play of Euripides. Dr. Bagshot gave my father a very favourable account of my progress, and recommended that in a year or two I should be transferred to a public school, from which, if I used ordinary diligence, I should be pretty sure of obtaining an excellent scholarship at one of the Universities.

I have always entertained a great regard for "old Bags," as we schoolboys irreverently termed him. He had a pompous, old-fashioned manner until you got to know him pretty well; but he was a capital scholar, and a very kind-hearted man. Besides, he had a genuine fondness for the sea, and everything appertaining to nautical affairs; and I have heard the big fellows say that, if he had not been a parson, he would have made a first-rate man-of-war captain. The school maintained two fine eight-oared boats, on board of which we used to go bathing and fishing, and occasionally on pic-nic excursions to other places on the coast. Old Bags always steered the crack boat, and it was great fun to see him, with his white tie all awry in his enthusiasm, bending his portly body, entreating the rowers to give way, and showing them how to feather their oars, like the jolly young waterman in the ballad, with skill and dexterity. I can't help feeling proud that my first knowledge of the art of rowing was obtained upon salt water, and not upon fresh; and I always entertain a little scorn for those who, however skilful they may be, are mere inland boating men,

because I know how awkward they would be, and how qualmish they would feel, if they had to tug out at sea against a strong breeze of wind.

Our boat carried sails as well as oars, and the Doctor used impartially to appoint each boy in succession, who was big enough to undertake it, the duty of attending to the sheets; so that all had an opportunity of learning something. Sometimes, too, he would give a sort of practical nautical lecture on shore. The masts and sails of our two boats were spread out on the lawn, and while we formed a circle around him, our worthy head master would point out the successive uses of each rope, and spar, and block, and sail, questioning his hearers on the subject until they were perfect.

He was very particular, also, in teaching every boy, big or little, to swim, and this was accomplished in a very simple manner. There were several wooden breakwaters along our coast, at the end of which the water was always deep, even at low tide; so that they formed convenient places from which to take a header. On one of these breakwaters might be seen, on any bathing-day, the portly figure of the Doctor, holding a stout rope some twenty feet long coiled in his hand. To the other end of this rope was attached a broad flannel belt, which was securely strapped round the learner's waist, and over his shoulders; the boy then jumped into the water, and a few spoken directions, assisted occasionally by a practised swimmer's hand under his chest, soon enabled the novice to acquire the art and mystery of striking out.

I was getting pretty well accustomed to the notion of the peaceable commonplace career which had been chalked out for me by my pastors and masters. From a private school to a public school, from thence to college, from

collège to a curacy, from a curacy to a rectory—such was the unadventurous prospect which I came to regard with some complacency. And yet there were times when the idea of such a humdrum existence seemed insupportable. In our school library there was a large folio atlas, and after poring over some of its maps—a frequent amusement of mine—I used to feel discontented with Harlington, and England, and civilization. I did not care much about the maps of such thickly-peopled countries as France and Germany,—there were too many towns and villages for my taste ; I used to prefer the maps of North America, and especially of Australia. The latter afforded a boundless field for an ardent imagination ; for the known parts of that gigantic island formed in those days a mere fringe round the coast, while in the centre there lay a blank space big enough to contain England, Scotland, and Ireland several times over, which was entirely unexplored.

I was unwilling to believe that this *terra incognita* consisted of nothing but burning deserts of sand : I rather hoped that some future explorer might there discover lofty mountains, higher perhaps than any on the surface of the globe, splendid lakes, and numbers of wild animals differing from all existing species. Perhaps in that mysterious inner region, dwelling on a table-land surrounded by a ring of mountains inaccessible to all mankind, except some favoured pioneer, there would be found all those monstrous creatures which peopled the globe ages and ages since, not buried beneath the rocks, or fossilized into stone, but alive and jolly. Fancy the delight of descending the inner slopes of these mountains, and catching sight of a primeval elephant, three times as big as our degenerate modern breed, and covered all over with shaggy hair ; or finding a great toad with a prickly back, as big as a Hereford ox ; or

seeing a mastodon crunching a forest of young trees between his massive teeth, as easily as we eat asparagus ; or sending a rifle-bullet clean through the snakelike head of a plesiosaurus ; or " potting " a pterodactyle !

I used to indulge in all these fancies after reading a delightful book of the late Dr. Buckland. My readers are aware by this time that those dreams are never likely to be realized. Since I was a boy nearly all the unknown tracts of the earth—except about the Poles—have been explored, and nothing very startling has been discovered. As for the interior of Australia, it appears to be very much like most other parts of the island—plenty of gum-trees and thickets of scrubs, no high mountains, and a great deficiency of permanent water.

I was about fourteen years of age when the gold discoveries took place in California, and these discoveries made a great impression on my mind. Hitherto gold had seemed to be one of the rarest of substances, and only to be found in countries where it was almost impossible for foreign gold-seekers to penetrate. If a digger, provided with a pick and shovel, had visited the Ural Mountains in hopes of being allowed to search for the precious metal, and to carry away all that he could find, the Russian policemen would very soon have requested him to quit the country, if they did not send him to cool his heels in Siberia ; while as for the west coast of Africa, no man of European blood could stand up to his knees in warm water, washing out minute grains of gold under the poisonous tropical sun. But now a gold region had been discovered in a healthy temperate climate, in a country which belonged to our own Transatlantic cousins, and where everybody was welcome to come and scramble for all he could get.

During the autumn holidays of that year, my father, for

a wonder, made a short trip to Scotland, and took me with him. He went for the purpose of inspecting some antiquarian remains that had lately been discovered, concerning which he was about to write a learned treatise. We visited the Highlands; and as up to that time I had never seen a bigger mountain than Box Hill, in Surrey, I was delighted.

While we were staying at a village on the shores of Loch Tay we fell in with an elderly Scotch minister, to whom my father took a great fancy, because he was a zealous antiquary. I also liked him because he told me stories about the rebellion in Canada, where he had served as a chaplain—on the loyalist side, of course—and had received a bullet in his shoulder, which he kept in a little case of shagreen leather, and was very proud of showing to anybody. He gave us an interesting account of the destruction of the steamer *Caroline*, which the rebels captured, set on fire, and then sent blazing down the Falls of Niagara.

But my readers have had enough of burning ships for the present; so I will proceed to tell them something else about this eccentric old minister. He and my father began talking about geology, of which my father knew ten times as much as he did, and the old minister then declared that there was as much gold in the Highlands of Scotland as in California; and that Ben Lawers, the mountain which overlooks Loch Tay, was rich with veins of the precious metal. He pulled several pieces of quartz rock out of his coat-tail pockets, and handed them to my father, pointing triumphantly to certain glittering yellow specks which appeared upon them. My youthful eyes sparkled at the sight, and I instantly formed an idea of buying a tent, pitching it on old Ben Lawers's rugged sides, and living

there as a gold-digger till the Michaelmas term began at Lempriere House.

My father took off his short-sighted spectacles, and peered closely and carefully into the quartz-stones which had been handed to him.

"These spots," he presently said quietly, "are only mica—a comparatively worthless substance."

"Pooh! sir," retorted the old minister, quite angrily, as he finished his toddy, "they're naething of the kind. If they're not gold, I'll swallow this toddy-tumbler! Come, laddie," he said, turning to me, "will ye go with me on a gold-exploring expedition?"

I looked with delighted eyes at my father, who immediately gave his consent, though he declined to accompany us, being averse to mountain-climbing.

The next morning we started at daybreak, accompanied by two labouring men, carrying pickaxes, shovels, hammers, and a plentiful supply of provisions. We wandered about till sundown; we saw some beautiful views; we got caught in a mist, which I thought greater fun than my elders did; we dug several holes and broke up several bits of rock; we ate and drank all our provisions with an excellent appetite; but we did not find a particle of gold. As far as I am aware, no gold has been discovered on Ben Lawers up to the present day. Yet I don't think the old minister has ever swallowed his toddy-tumbler, though he has no doubt since emptied it pretty frequently.

When I went back to school I was full of ideas about gold-digging, and confided my thoughts to a crony of mine, who, though a dull fellow at Latin and Greek, was a most ingenious mechanic. Said he, "Although we can't find any gold at Harlington, we'll at least show the other fellows how people dig for it in California." He took out of his

play-box an illustrated newspaper containing some drawings of the implemerts used in the gold-diggings ; he constructed from these drawings a neatly-made "cradle ;" he then obtained from a friend in Portsmouth dockyard a quantity of brass filings, and asked permission of the doctor to be allowed to do what he pleased for a few days, in a waste and unfrequented corner of the playground.

Manthorpe, in spite of his ignorance of classics, was a great favourite of the head master, for he never got into any mischief, and on many occasions he proved himself most useful. It was he who was entrusted with the sole charge of the manufacture of fireworks for the 5th of November, and his rockets flew up as high and burst into as many brilliant sparks as those supplied by the professional makers. It was he who, when the mania for kite-flying sprang up, constructed one of such gigantic proportions that, on a gusty day, it nearly pulled the corpulent doctor off his feet, so that we expected to see him fly off the cliff and sail over to France, clinging to the kite-string. It was he who, upon the occasion of Miss Bagshot's eighteenth birthday—which was kept as a festival—sent up six fire-balloons in succession, on the transparent sides of which balloons, made of many-coloured silver-paper, the initials of each of the doctor's children were successively made visible to the cheering crowd of boys below.

To return to our miniature gold-diggings. Manthorpe dug a circular pit about seven feet in depth. At the bottom of this pit he buried his brass-filings, well mixed with a quantity of stiff clay. Assisted by me and by another enthusiast, and being provided with a simple windlass for hoisting out the buckets of wash-dirt, he exhibited the whole process of gold-digging, from the point where the auriferous earth is first reached up to the moment when the golden

grains were triumphantly exhibited, cleansed from all earthy impurities at the bottom of a tin dish. Manthorpe was so clever in all such matters as these that I always fancied in after-years he would become a famous engineer, or at least a popular lecturer at the Royal Polytechnic Institution ; instead of which he settled down as a clergyman in a comfortable family living, among the fat and fertile fields of Lincolnshire.

In those days, if I had been asked which of the two—Manthorpe or myself—was most likely to take orders in the Church, I should have betted on the latter, being totally unaware that a storm was gathering which was destined to change my career in life altogether. My brother Alfred, who was ten years older than myself, was the cause of this change. I had never seen much of him, for when I was a baby he was away at a distant boarding-school, and soon afterwards was placed in a merchant's office at Liverpool. He was not a favourite with my father and mother, and he usually spent his holidays with relatives in the north of England. When I became old enough to understand such matters, I learnt from my mother that his conduct was not good, that he had got into debt, and that my father had made himself responsible for his debts.

At length the news came that Alfred had lost his situation, and had quitted England. He never wrote a word to say what had become of him, but, in consequence of his flight, all the creditors came down upon my father, and he was sorely pressed for ready money. I shall not easily forget the day—it was towards the end of the Christmas holidays—when my father sent Lucy to say he wanted to speak to me in the study. I guessed that he must have something important to tell me, for he was not generally in the habit of sending such formal invitations.

I found him sitting over the fire, and thought I had never seen him looking more old, and anxious, and careworn. His porcelain pipe was in his hand ; but though he put it every now and then mechanically to his lips, there was no fire in it. "Steve, my boy," he said, as he blinked kindly at me through his spectacles, and held me by the hand, "I had hoped to make a scholar of you. I wanted one of my sons to be a really well-educated man, but it can't be done. I can't afford the money. Your unlucky brother" (here he laid his trembling hand on a heap of bills) "has taken away what should have been your birthright—the right of education. You must begin to earn your bread, Stephen, in a few days' time. Do you feel sorry?"

"I am very sorry for you, father," I answered ; "and I shall be sorry to leave old Bagshot, and all the fellows there, and the boating and the bathing ; but I shall be glad to be of some use to you. But what can I do to earn my living? I have been taught no trade."

"I have arranged that you shall learn a trade—and a very pleasant, profitable trade it is too, though not so honourable as literature or the Church. How should you like, Steve," said my father, rubbing his hands, "to become a shipowner?"

A shipowner ! My face flushed with delight. I instantly thought of a beautiful fore-and-aft schooner which Manthorpe and I had admired as she lay in Harlington Roads, and on board of which we had agreed that it would be delightful to make a voyage of discovery among the islands of the Pacific, exchanging knives, and hatchets, and scarlet cloth, for bread-fruit, and hogs, and yams, and cocoa-nuts, and every now and then staying ashore for a month or two at a time in company with such pleasant islanders as Kory-Kory, Marheyo, and Fayaway, whose acquaintance I had

recently made in the fascinating pages of Herman Melville. A shipowner must, I thought, be one of the happiest of human beings. He has only to say the word, and his captain and crew are bound to take him to any part of the world he pleases. So, in reply to my father's question, I said, "I should like to become a shipowner very much indeed."

My father's spirits rose when he saw how pleased I seemed to be. He thrust an allumette between the bars of the grate, and lighted his pipe, saying, as he did so,—

"I have made acquaintance with a very kind-hearted, agreeable fellow, who has promised, within the space of five years, to teach you the whole art and mystery of ship-owning. Here is his card."

He handed me a card bearing the following inscription :—

HAILES M'GAFFNEY AND CO.,
Shipowners, Insurance Brokers, and Emigration Agents,
154, GOREE PLAZZAS, LIVERPOOL.

"Liverpool?" I said, doubtfully. "Won't it be rather unpleasant to go to the same place as—as——?"

"I know exactly what you mean, my boy," interrupted my father. "You would rather not be where Alfred has misconducted himself. Make yourself easy on that point. Liverpool is a large place. Mr. M'Gaffney never heard of Alfred, and has no acquaintance with the firm in whose counting-house Alfred used to be."

"And how soon do you wish me to go?" I asked.

"The sooner the better, Steve. Within a week if mamma can get your things ready. Now that I know you wish to

be a shipowner, I need delay no longer paying Mr. M'Gaffney the premium."

I had a long talk with my mother after this. She was more worldly-wise than my father, and not so sanguine of my success as he was.

"I scarcely know what to say, my dear Stephen," she said. "Your papa has acted very hastily. He made Mr. M'Gaffney's acquaintance at an hotel, I believe, and he did not take the advice of any of his former Liverpool friends. He could not bear to visit them, he says, because of Alfred's misconduct."

"Papa talked about paying a premium: what does that mean, mother?"

"It means a sum of money which Mr. M'Gaffney expects for the privilege of allowing you to come into his office; besides which we are to pay him for your board and lodging. The premium alone will be a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds? Why, I had better stay at old Bagshot's."

"That is quite true, my dear, if you only look at the present time. The first year in Liverpool will cost more than a year at Lempriere House; but then Mr. M'Gaffney promises to give you a salary on the 1st of January next, if your conduct is good."

"A salary? Oh, won't that be jolly! I have never earned a halfpenny yet since I was born. I shall buy something for you, mother, and something for Lucy, and something for—— But how," said I, interrupting myself, "will papa manage to pay this hundred pounds?"

"His publishers have kindly undertaken to advance the money."

"Oh! mother, what an expensive little wretch I am! But I hope to make it all up by-and-by. Just fancy what

to come down to-night. You'll not be for taking a kyar; I suppose?"

"A kyar? What is that?"

"A coach—a cab they call it in London. Walking will be better for your health."

"Then I'll certainly walk."

"That's right, sir; and I'll carry your boxes on my truck."

My first impressions of Liverpool were by no means prepossessing. The streets were thronged with people; but there was scarcely a decently-dressed person among them. The women, with their rough, uncombed heads, naked feet, and slatternly shawls, looked like white savages; while the children, who were about the streets in hundreds and thousands, though the shops were beginning to shut for the night, seemed the dirtiest, raggedest little creatures I had ever seen. Both they and their parents lived, for the most part, in dark, damp, dismal cellars below the level of the streets.

"Is all Liverpool like this?" I asked, in a tone of the deepest melancholy.

"Like this? No; Heaven preserve us if it was. No, no; there's some dacent places in Liverpool, though it can't hold a candle to the city of Dublin, for that matter."

"Are we near Mr. M'Gaffney's yet?"

"It's quite convanient, sir," replied my guide; and indeed a few minutes later we entered a quiet street of a superior description to those which we had lately traversed, and presently stopped before a private house, on the door of which was a brass plate bearing the following inscription—

"MRS. M'GAFFNEY'S SELECT BOARDING-HOUSE."

As he knocked at the door, my attendant, whose name was

Toohy, touched his cap, and whispered that he would be glad of a trifle for carrying my things.

"How much ought I to give you?" asked I, blushing, and fumbling in my pocket.

Now an Englishman would have answered, "What you please, sir. I leaves that to you;" and then most likely would have gone away grumbling unless I had considerably overpaid him. But my Dublin friend was far more explanatory.

"Well, sir," he replied, "there ye place me in a difficulty. If ye wanted to plaze yourself, maybe you'd offer me sixpence. But if ye wanted to plaze me, you'd offer me eighteenpence. Suppose we split the difference, and say a shilling?"

I thought this proposition a fair one, and placed the required coin in his hand.

The door was opened by a good-humoured, but rather dirty, servant-girl.

"I've fetched the young gentleman, Miss Bridget," says Mr. Toohy, respectfully.

"And a nice-looking young gentleman he is," observed Miss Bridget, making me blush, as she shaded the candle with her hand and carefully examined my face. "I hope you've enjoyed your journey, sir." She then turned sharply round, and screamed upstairs, "Mistress! mistress! you're wanted."

"How can I come now, Biddy," presently answered a voice from the first-floor landing, "when I'm after giving the boarders their suppers?"

"It's the young gentleman from London," replied Biddy, "and I didn't know whether you'd care to have him upstairs?"

"Oh! it's young Mr. Scudamore, is it?" said the voice

from above, in an altered tone. "Please to give him my compliments, and say I'll be down with him in a minute."

There was no need for Biddy to deliver this civil message about the compliments, for I could hear it as well as she could ; so we just stood and looked at each other till the rustling of a silk dress on the stairs proclaimed the approach of Mrs. M'Gaffney. She was a tall, stout, rosy-faced lady of forty, or thereabouts, who shook hands with me very kindly ; asked very particularly after the health of my papa and mamma and sister, as if she had known them all her life ; and then invited me, as soon as I had washed my hands and face in Mr. M'Gaffney's dressing-room, to come and sit in her private parlour.

"Biddy, lay the cloth, there's a good girl," said the mistress of the house, "and bring Mr. Scudamore anything that those greedy souls upstairs have forgotten to eat. There'll be a bit of rabbit-pie, I'm sure, and you must draw him a glass of ale. This is my snugger, Mr. Scudamore ; my sole place of retreat, barring my bed-chamber, from the noisy world of a boarding-house. I'd have introduced ye upstairs, but I could see you were tired, and there was a little more noise than ordinary because Captain Whelan was keeping his birthday."

The good lady rattled away in this style all the time I was eating ; but I had gained a very good appetite in the railway-carriage, and I managed to make an excellent supper on the remnants of the repast which had been left by the company upstairs. All the rabbit's bones had been picked clean ; but there was a bit of pie-crust, there was half a mutton chop, and the rind of a cheese : so, with plenty of bread-and-butter, though the butter was rather rancid, I managed to do extremely well.

I have already observed that my father had brought us

up in a Spartan fashion, feeding us on very plain food, and teaching us to pay little attention to our eating and drinking. Since those days I have often had to eat so many worse suppers than Mrs. M'Gaffney's, that I have felt thankful for the wholesome discipline of my childhood.

I had scarcely finished my supper, when I heard a latch-key rattling in the street-door, and presently a sharp, quick step sounded in the passage.

"It's Mr. M'Gaffney," observed his wife, turning with a smile towards me. "Pierce, darling," she said, putting her head into the passage, "Mr. Scudamore has arrived from London."

"And very proud I am to make Mr. Scudamore's acquaintance," said a neatly-dressed, dapper little man, with a shining bald head and large black whiskers, as he advanced and shook me warmly by the hand. "Where's Mr. Pawle, Katie?"

"Gone to bed. He said he was dog-tired, trapesing about the streets all day."

"He must be up by six, and down at the Saragossa Dock. The *Jabez P. Skinner* is going to haul into the stream at daylight, and these tickets must be handed over to the passengers. Are you a good getter up, Mr. Scudamore?"

"I hope so, sir."

"That's right. Lie-a-beds don't prosper in our business, do they, Katie? Perhaps you'd like to go down to the dock with Mr. Pawle in the morning? It'll give you a practical insight into our business."

"I should like it very much, sir, if Mr. Pawle doesn't——"

"Oh, ye needn't be afraid of Mr. Pawle," exclaimed Mrs. M'Gaffney, with a loud laugh. "He's only a young gentleman like yourself—maybe a year or two older. Biddy

shall call you both at six ; indeed, she can scarcely help doing so, for you sleep in the same apartment."

"Well, Katie, I'm dead beat myself," said Mr. M'Gaffney, with a yawn ; "so I'll just take a tumbler of punch and go to bed. Why, you're yawning too, Mr. Scudamore ! I think you'd better be off likewise. Biddy shall show you the way. Biddy ! a chamber-candlestick for Mr. Scudamore. Pleasant dreams, my young friend ; and may you to-morrow lay the foundation-stone of your future fortunes." As he said this, he shook me very heartily by the hand.

I was mightily pleased at the manner in which I had been received by Mr. and Mrs. M'Gaffney, and felt fully half an inch taller as I followed Biddy upstairs. Although I was fourteen years of age, I had been treated as a mere child by my father and mother ; at Lempriere House I was only a schoolboy ; but here, at No. 5, St. Ninian's Terrace, I was styled Mr. Scudamore, and regarded as a grown-up person. One thing I wondered at. Why did Mrs. M'Gaffney speak with a strong Irish accent, while Mr. M'Gaffney talked like a north-country Englishman ? Biddy afterwards explained the phenomenon. Mistress was "rale" Irish, and hailed from the county Wexford ; while her husband was born of Irish parents in Liverpool.

My sleeping apartment, as Mrs. M'Gaffney grandly styled it, was in reality a shabby little garret, containing two turn-up bedsteads. One of these was intended for me, the other was occupied by Mr. Prawle, of whom I could see nothing at first, except that he had a very red complexion. But while Biddy was smoothing down my pillow, the light dazzled his eyes, I suppose, and awoke him. At any rate, he sat up in bed, rubbed his hands into a thick head of

yellowish hair till it all stood on end, opened a very big mouth, stared at me with a pair of goggling blue eyes, and then exclaimed sleepily—

“I say, Biddy, what’s the meaning of this? Is it daylight or candlelight?”

“Sure, it’s candlelight, Mr. Prawle; so ye needn’t be alarmed. Ye’ve got seven hours’ good sleep forninst ye yet. It’s only eleven.”

“Then, why on earth——”

“Why, don’t ye see, Mr. Prawle? Here’s the new young gentleman, Mr. Scudamore, from London.”

“How de do, Mr. Scrub——”

Mr. Prawle could get no further. His big mouth expanded into a tremendous yawn, and he sank back on his pillow fast asleep.

I did not sleep very soundly. My rest was disturbed by perpetual dreams. I was continually riding in railway-carriages, with all sorts of incongruous people for my fellow-passengers. First, Dr. Bagshot came and set me a copy of Latin hexameters; then a bare-footed girl drew near with a basket, and cried, in a pitiful voice, “Want chips!”* then Mr. M’Gaffney came galloping on one side of the railway-carriage mounted on Bruno, while Mrs. M’Gaffney rode on the other side mounted on Gipsy; then an awful voice muttered in my ear, “Macbeth hath murdered sleep—the innocent sleep,” causing me to start up in a terrible fright, and stare about me.

I believe it was Mr. Prawle who had played me this trick, though when I looked up he was busily engaged in combing his hair before a little cracked looking-glass, and whistling a popular air.

* A familiar street-cry in Liverpool.

"Well, Mr. Skidmore," he observed, glancing round at me—"I beg your pardon; I didn't catch your name."

"Scudamore," I said.

"Scudamore," he repeated after me. "So Biddy tells me that you're coming out with me. I shall be delighted to have your company; but at the same time think it right to inform you that there's a delightful shower of sleet falling, and about six inches of slush in the street. It never snows in *this* beastly, muggy hole of a place."

"I should like to go very much, if you'll let me."

"Let you? Of course I will. There, I've done with the basin, and shall be ready to hand over this magnificent mirror by the time you want it."

As soon as we were dressed we went downstairs into the kitchen, where Biddy gave us two cups of tea, very hot and very weak, and two hunches of bread, very sparingly besmeared with butter. We then put on our pea-jackets, turned the collars up, and went out into the chilly air of a miserable January morning.

There were very few people about the streets at that early hour, for the indoor artizans, whose work begins at six o'clock, were already inside their shops and factories; while the out-door labourers, who require daylight for the prosecution of their tasks, were only just beginning to show themselves. But when we reached the Saragossa Dock, which lay at some distance, all was bustle and animation. The *Jabez P. Skinner*, bound for New York with passengers and a general cargo, was being slowly warped towards the dock-gates. Her decks were crowded with emigrants, who were frantically waving their hats and handkerchiefs to friends on shore, most of whom had apparently been sitting up all night, to judge from their sleepy faces. A crowd of at least a hundred or a hundred and fifty persons

accompanied the vessel in her tardy passage towards the dock-gates, and probably none of them came merely from motives of curiosity. However long the departure of a ship may be deferred, there is always a great deal of business to be done at the last moment. Mr. Prawle climbed nimbly up the side of the ship, in order to transact his business with the emigrants, bidding me remain on the quay; and I amused myself while there with watching the various scenes around me, and listening to the Babel of voices. Here are some of the conversations I heard:—

“Thady, darling, ye’ll write to me,” cried a girl with a handkerchief tied round her head, and her apron up to her eyes.

“No, that I won’t, bekase I can’t,” answered a jovial young Irishman, who stood in the fore-rigging, and spun his brimless hat on his shillelagh by way of attracting the attention of his friends; “but the first praste I meet in Ameriky shall write ye a letter, Mary, and, plaze God, I’ll send ye the passage-mōney in a twelvemonth’s time.”

Then came a man with a very anxious face, driving a great obstinate pig through the crowd. He addressed himself to the ship’s cook, who said in reply—

“What d’ye want with that overgrown brute alongside at this time of day? My pig-pens are full.”

The pig-driver answered, “Sure, don’t I tell ye the captain picked him out with his own blessed eyes, in the market, gave me half the price down, and an order on the office for the rest?”

Amid all the confusion, I could hear the dockmaster’s loud clear voice—

“Now, then, my sons, take her along easy. Mind that starboard warp; don’t graze her shins.”

Then a red-faced gentleman, carrying an umbrella, pushed his way down to the ship's side, and shouted out, angrily :—

“Is that second mate aboard, or is he not? Oh! there you are, sir!” (*with a bow of mock politeness*). “I can see the peak of your gold-laced cap. I want to know why my nineteen cases, marked ‘X Q’ in diamond, are shut out?”

SECOND MATE (*blandly*).—“Really, sir, it's your own fault. Your goods came alongside too late for shipment.”

ANGRY SHIPPER (*furiously*).—“'Tis false, sir.—Hallo! you rascal, what do you mean by this?”

PIG-DRIVER.—“I ax your pardon, sir, if the pig got between your legs.” (*Shouting*). “Now, then, Mister Cook! stand by to heave out a coil of rope, and I'll make it fast under his belly.”

SHIP'S COOK.—“Ay, ay.”

ANGRY SHIPPER.—“If there's justice to be got in the town of Liverpool, I'll have it.”

DOCKMASTER.—“That's it, my sons. Side her along. There she goes.”

In a few minutes more, the dock-gates closed behind the *Jabez P. Skinner*, and she floated on the broad bosom of the Mersey. In spite of the sleet, and the bitter east wind, and the crowded state of her decks, I longed to be aboard of her.

“She's one of Mr. M'Gaffney's ships, I suppose?” I said, addressing Mr. Prawle, as soon as we rejoined each other.

“Of course she is, else I shouldn't be down here.”

“What a rich man Mr. M'Gaffney must be!” said I to myself. “This is only one of his ships, and she must be worth several thousands of pounds. I wonder Mrs. M'Gaffney cares to take in boarders; but I suppose she is fond of company.”

"How many ships has Mr. M'Gaffney altogether?" I ventured to ask presently.

"I can't tell you. The number differs from one week to another."

"What! does he have fresh ships every week?"

"Ay; sometimes every day."

"How immensely rich he must be!"

As I uttered these words, Mr. Prawle stood still, and looked me hard in the face.

"I say, Scudamore," he said, "are you joking or serious?"

"Joking! I don't know what you mean."

"I do believe he's in earnest," muttered Mr. Prawle to himself. "Do you suppose Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co. are the owners of that ship which has just hauled out of dock?"

"Certainly I do."

"Oh! you jolly greenhorn! Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! ha!"

Mr. Prawle stood and laughed at me in the open street, till my face grew as red as his own with annoyance.

"Come, old boy," he said at length, "don't be savage. We must all be green once in our lives, and you're not twenty-four hours old in Liverpool yet; but I couldn't help laughing at the idea of Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co. being shipowners."

"But they say they are on their card."

"Yes, of course they do."

"And you told me so, Mr. Prawle."

"Never, my friend, never."

"You said that the *Jabez P. Skinner* was Mr. M'Gaffney's ship, and that he had many other ships, fresh ones, every week."

"I didn't mean that he *owned* them ; I meant that he had business on board. If we send down one emigrant to a vessel, we call her 'our ship.' There are many worse fellows than M'Gaffney in the emigration business : he won't go out of his way to chouse a passenger ; but don't you go and mistake him for a shipowner. What did your father pay for your coming here ?"

"A hundred pounds."

Mr. Prawle screwed up his mouth as if he was going to whistle.

"Does that include your board ?"

"No ; we are to pay fifteen shillings a week for my board."

Mr. Prawle professed to be greatly astonished.

"I retract the observation," he said, "which I made just now about M'Gaffney's chousing propensities. I say, Scudamore," he added, after a pause, "I should uncommonly like to see your father."

"I shall be very happy to introduce him to you one of these days," I answered innocently. "But why do you wish to see him ?"

"Because he is so deliciously verdant. He must be the original Green Man from which the signboard at the top of Blackheath Hill was painted. Here we are at Goree Piazzas, and this is the door of our lovely counting-house. Enter, my youthful friend and fellow-clerk, and I will introduce you to the great Parker, our book-keeper."

The following extract from a letter which I wrote to my mother a few days afterwards will give some further idea of the kind of life I led at Mr. M'Gaffney's. I did not like it much ; but I made the best I could of it, for my father's sake :—

"I like Mr. M'Gaffney pretty well ; but I see very little of

him, as he is nearly always out. Mrs. M'Gaffney seems very good-natured. Mr. Parker, the book-keeper, is a grumpy old fellow ; but I am sorry for him because he has such a dreadful cough. I like Prawle very much. He laughs at me a good deal,—he says I am so green ; but he teaches me everything he can. He comes from London. His father is a retired ship-captain, and lives at Bow. This is a slack time for business, because very few emigrants go in the winter, and most of our business is with emigrants. I sometimes go with Prawle when he takes them about to the shops to buy the things which they want for the voyage ; and it is great fun to hear them talk, they are so simple and ignorant—almost as ignorant as I am, Prawle says. The food is not very good. The tea is rather weak ; but I should like it still less if it were strong, because it has not a nice taste. Sometimes we go home to dinner ; sometimes Toohey, the messenger, brings our dinner in a large basin, and we eat it in the office. I don't sit in the evening with the boarders, who are all men, and mostly captains and mates of ships, because they smoke pipes and make a good deal of noise. Mrs. M'Gaffney lets me sit in her private parlour. I don't mean to forget all my Latin and Greek. I read an ode of Horace and a few verses of the Greek Testament every evening. Prawle has never learnt Greek, and only the Delectus in Latin ; but he knows lots of things that I don't. He is very quick at arithmetic, he can measure goods, and he understands how to explain things to the emigrants, who often fancy they have been cheated. Prawle has an uncle in Williamson Square, and he is going to take me to have tea there some evening. You want to know if I have ever seen Mr. Hailes, the senior partner of the firm ; so I asked Mrs. M'Gaffney about him. She told me that he was in delicate health,

and was making a 'tower,' as she calls it, in France and Italy. Prawle declares that Mr. Hailes has been making this 'tower' ever since he came to the office, and that he does not believe there is any such person in existence. Don't fret about me. I shall like the life better when I get more accustomed to it."

I cannot say that the life in Liverpool improved on further acquaintance. I found myself constantly wishing that I was back at Lempriere House, where, though I was only treated as a schoolboy, I lived with respectable, honourable people. I soon found that there were all sorts of shabby little tricks perpetrated in our office. Ships were represented as being on the point of starting, though Mr. M'Gaffney knew that they wouldn't sail for several weeks; emigrants were taken to shops where they paid very high prices for the goods they bought, part of the price being returned to Mr. M'Gaffney by the shopkeepers; provisions, which were often quite unfit to eat, were sent on board the ships. I used to complain to Prawle of these dishonest proceedings. He did not attempt to defend them; but he said it was the custom of the trade, and that an emigration-agent would not be able to make a living unless he made some extra profits by such practices. I often felt very melancholy, and longed to be either at home again, or else out at sea, away from the smoky atmosphere of Liverpool and the shabby doings of such people as Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co.

There was one subject which Prawle and I were never tired of discussing, and I was always in better spirits after discussing it. Before I left Lempriere House rumours had reached England that some of the miners who had gone from Australia to California had returned to New South Wales, and had discovered gold there also. These dis-

coveries were followed by far richer discoveries in Victoria, and great excitement took place in England on the subject. Ships were chartered for the purpose of carrying provisions and merchandise to the gold-diggers, and numbers of people began to take their passages for the land of gold. Every day we heard stories of tradesmen who were offering their businesses for sale, and of clerks who were throwing up their situations, in order that they might start for Melbourne. Prawle and I longed to go too. We were both thoroughly tired of the miserable, dull, grinding life at M'Gaffney's ; but we had no means of paying our passages. Prawle's father was quite a poor man, who lived on a pension allowed him by a shipowning firm at Blackwall, in whose service he had been. As for my father, I could not have the face to ask him to send me out to Australia, when he had impoverished himself for the sake of placing me in Mr. M'Gaffney's office. Day by day I grew more discontented, and I was preparing to do something desperate, when a circumstance occurred ;—but I must tell this part of my story in a fresh chapter.





CHAPTER IV.

A Fortunate Visit—Mr. William Hayward's Offer—My uncivil Reply—A Letter at Breakfast-time—Another Offer—My Delight—Prawle's Melancholy—A Trip to London—Farewell—On board the Ruth Hayward—Mr. Hennessy and I in the Store-room—The Boy with the Lantern—My Surprise.

WHEN I had been some months in Liverpool, and had begun to learn the ways of the place, I found that our firm stood very low in public estimation. One day when I was crossing the Exchange I heard one man say to another, "If you want a job of that sort done you must go to a cad like M'Gaffney." The blood mounted to my cheeks as I listened to these insulting words; and I made a resolution that before another month ended I would write to my mother, and ask her to try and get me into some other office. As for my poor father's hundred pounds, which he was painfully paying off to his publishers by the labour of his brains, I feared, now that I knew what a slippery gentleman Mr. M'Gaffney was, that we should never get any portion of it back again.

It was not often that I put my head into the counting-house of any respectable firm, the people with whom we had dealings were mostly small shabby folks like ourselves, who squabbled over the settlement of every account, and

never paid any money till they had been asked for it half a dozen times. But one day—I always mark that day with a white stone in my calendar—Mr. M'Gaffney sent me to collect a small sum of money which, for a wonder, was due to us from the great firm of Hayward Brothers & Bannister, who were not like Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co., pettifogging little agents, screwing their profits out of the pockets of poor helpless Irish emigrants; but real ship-owners, owning a whole fleet of noble vessels. Instead of our dingy little office with a fly-blown map of the United States over the mantelpiece, and old Parker in his rusty brown tail-coat wrangling at the counter with a Tipperary farmer about a matter of eighteenpence—instead of this seediness and shabbiness, the whole of a roomy old-fashioned mansion was devoted to the business of Messrs. Hayward Brothers & Bannister. There was the Silk Department, the Cotton Department, the Freight Department, and I don't know how many other departments; and in each of these offices there was a swarm of clerks, dressed in the height of fashion, and extremely grand and haughty in their manners. I was ordered about from pillar to post before I could get my little account settled. At last a young gentleman with a blue necktie condescended to scribble his initials upon it in red ink; then another young gentleman in a green necktie scribbled his initials on it in black ink, lastly I was referred to the Cash Department, where I received the money. I was just in the act of writing the receipt, "Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co., per Stephen Scudamore," when a plainly-dressed shrewd-faced elderly gentleman looked attentively at me as he entered the room and passed in through a little railed door among the clerks. He took up the account which I had just signed, and examined it with some curiosity, saying something in the

cashier's ear as he did so. I was in the act of pushing open the swing-door, in order to leave the office, when I heard a peremptory voice behind me, saying, "Hey, you boy!" I turned quickly round and saw that the cashier was beckoning me. I was in a great fright, I thought I had unintentionally committed some dire mercantile offence, and wondered what it could be. I became a little reassured when the cashier went on to say in a pleasanter voice, "Mr. William Hayward wishes to speak to you—that green door yonder."

"Come in, my boy, don't be alarmed," said a good-natured voice, as I entered with hesitating steps. "I want to ask you one or two questions."

In another moment I found myself face to face with the great shipowner; but he looked so benevolent, that I felt far more at home with him than I did with Mr. M'Gaffney.

"I see your name is Stephen Scudamore," said Mr. Hayward, "is your father's name Stephen also?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he ever in the East Indies?"

"Yes, sir. At Bombay, where he was a surgeon."

"Exactly, that's the man I mean."

Mr. Hayward then went on to ask me a number of questions about my father's present occupation and prospects, and expressed great regret when he heard that he had paid a hundred pounds for the sake of placing me in, such an office as M'Gaffney's.

"You may be surprised, Scudamore," continued Mr. Hayward, "at my showing so much interest in your father, when I tell you that up to this moment I have never set eyes on him; but you must know that many years ago, while I was engaged up the country, my wife was taken very ill in Bombay, and was ordered to leave immediately for a

cooler climate. She went to the Cape of Good Hope, and she always spoke with gratitude of the kindness she had received from Mr. Scudamore, the surgeon of the ship."

"I think that must have been my father, sir, for he is kind to everybody, and I believe he is a clever surgeon. But he has not the art of making money. He is so easily deceived. He thinks everybody is as honest and simple-minded as himself."

"So I should suppose," said Mr. Hayward drily. "Now, do you like being at M'Gaffney's?"

"No, sir. I dislike it very much. I think I should run away if it wasn't for Prawle."

"Who is Prawle?"

"Another boy who is there. He hates it as much as I do."

"How should you like to come into my office?" said Mr. Hayward, smiling, and playing with his watch-chain.

• "I think I should like it better than M'Gaffney's, sir."

"Better ~~than~~ M'Gaffney's!" exclaimed Mr. Hayward, half annoyed and half amused; "I should think you would! Why, are you aware, Scudamore, how eagerly the seats in my counting-house are sought for? I have two noblemen's sons and the heir to a baronetcy among my young men."

"Perhaps they are fonder of sitting at desks than I am, sir." The moment after I had uttered these words I could have bitten off my tongue for making such an impudent, ungracious speech; but it was too late.

"Very well, my boy, I have no desire to compel you to enter my office," answered Mr. Hayward. Then, after a pause, he said, "Be kind enough to give me your father's address: I should like to write to him. Good

morning." He said these last words quite stiffly, and I went away covered with confusion. I felt so angry with myself for not having thanked Mr. Hayward for his kindness, instead of blustering out such a rude remark as I did; but I was particularly shy and awkward that morning, for I fancied that Mr. Hayward must have heard of my brother Alfred's misconduct, and expected every minute that he would allude to it. I did not consider how big a town Liverpool was, and that probably not a week passes without some unlucky clerk getting himself into some serious trouble.

After tea that evening I confided my adventure to the ears of Mr. Prawle, and he gave me a fine scolding for my folly.

"Why what a fool you've been, Stephen," says he. "Mr. William Hayward is one of the first men in Liverpool: There's as much difference between him and this chousing humbug whose carpet I'm treading on, as there is between the horse that won the Chester Cup and a broken-down costermonger's donkey. I should have jumped out of my skin if Mr. Hayward had offered me what he offered you."

"Wouldn't he have been very much surprised, Prawle, if you had?" I answered, laughing.

"Well, well, you know what I mean—I spoke meteorologically. They're all swells in Hayward's office. It's a feather in a man's cap to have served there. There are all sorts of good appointments in India, and China, and in the Brazils, to be got from Hayward's office. I only wish I could persuade the old boy that *my* father had physicked his wife; wouldn't I work the oracle, and no mistake? I should be appointed to a berth in the Wool, or the Jute, or the Cotton Department before next Monday morning. I'm afraid, Stephen, you're a flat, as your father was before you."

"I'm much obliged to you, Prawle, for being so candid," I exclaimed, rather fiercely.

"You ought to be obliged to me," says that red-faced rascal, quite gravely. "I'm your best friend, Stephen, parents not excepted."

In the course of a few days I heard from my mother. She told me that my father was delighted at a letter he had received from a Liverpool merchant, thanking him for his skilful treatment of a lady on board an East Indiaman, thirty years ago. "Your father," continued my mother, "instantly sat down and wrote a long and very interesting letter to Mr. Hayward in reply, but he never said a word about Mr. M'Gaffney, nor did he thank Mr. Hayward for his offer to put you into a better position. I have tried to make up for the deficiency. I have slipped in a note for your famous merchant friend, telling him what a dear, excellent, unpractical creature your papa is ; telling him also exactly what my views are about you, and what you would like yourself." I feel so angry with that horrid Mr. M'Gaffney for deceiving your poor innocent father. Your father confesses that when he met him at the Crooked Billet, he judged him to be one of the commercial pillars of Liverpool."

A few days afterwards we were all sitting at breakfast in St. Ninian's Terrace. Mrs. M'Gaffney was occupied with pouring out the tea, Biddy was busy at the sideboard cutting bread-and-butter (for there were two master mariners and three mates at the table, all with appetites as keen as sharks), Mr. M'Gaffney was reading aloud the London letter in the *Liverpool Albion* for the benefit of the assembled company, while Prawle and I, being modest youths, were staring solemnly at the Chinese figures crossing the bridge in our willow-patterned plates. Suddenly

the postman knocked at the street-door. Mr. Prawle jumped up to take in the letters, for he was expecting his monthly allowance of pocket-money from Bow. It did not come, as he hoped; but he handed me a letter instead, saying, as he did so, "Quite an aristocratic affair, Stephen."

"Sure, that's an elegant seal, Mr. Scudamore," cries Mrs. M'Gaffney, suspending her tea-pouring operations. "It reminds me of my grandfather's letters when I lived at home in the county Wexford."

"A confidential communication, eh, Scudamore?" says Mr. M'Gaffney, looking up from his newspaper with a sly smile.

"Oh, no, sir; you can read it, if you please."

So Mr. M'Gaffney read it aloud:—

"Mr. William Hayward will feel obliged if Mr. Scudamore will call at his office this day (Monday) at twelve o'clock."

"Bless me," exclaimed Mr. M'Gaffney, with quite an air of astonishment—"do you know Mr. William Hayward?"

"A little, sir. My father did him a service many years ago, for which he feels grateful."

"Stephen," exclaimed Mrs. M'Gaffney, "I'd no conception ye were acquainted with such grand folks! Sure, ye must put in a word for my poor husband. Couldn't he give Mr. Hayward a hint about that prime lot of mess-beef, eh, Pierce, darling?"

"Nonsense, Katie," answered her husband. "That's not the way to do business. First, let us hear what Mr. Hayward wants to say to Mr. Scudamore."

But on this point I declined to give any information: so Mr. M'Gaffney went on reading the paper, with his mouth full of buttered toast and bloaters.

•You may be sure that I kept the appointment punctually. Exactly as St. Nicholas clock struck twelve I mounted the stairs of Messrs. Hayward Brothers & Bannister's establishment. I was only kept waiting five minutes, and was then ushered into Mr. William Hayward's private apartment.

"Well, Scudamore, I have had a letter from your mother. She tells me that you don't like office work, and that you are bent on going to Australia to dig for gold. I think you are a foolish fellow. I don't suppose you will find any gold, and you will undergo a great many hardships."

"That's just what I should like, sir."

"Oh, should you?" said Mr. Hayward, laughing. "Well, well; perhaps I should have said the same at your age. Now, I'll tell you what I propose to do. For your father's sake, I am determined that you shall not stay at such a wretched place as M'Gaffney's."

"Thank you, sir, very much."

"I am still willing, in spite of your refusal the other day" (here I blushed deeply), "to take you into my office; but, if you prefer it, I'll send you to Australia. Which do you choose?"

"Australia, sir!" I cried.

"Very well. Don't blame me hereafter if you regret your choice."

"Certainly not, sir."

As I said these words, Mr. Hayward touched a hand bell. A clerk instantly appeared. "Ask Captain Staunton to be kind enough to step this way."

In a few minutes there entered a very tall, stout, handsome man of forty, with a close-shaven face, dyed nut-brown by exposure to the weather.

"Staunton," said Mr. Hayward, "this is the boy I spoke to you about."

"Ever been to sea, young gentleman?" said Captain Staunton, with a smile.

"No, sir."

"What shall we do with him, Staunton? He wants to get to Melbourne."

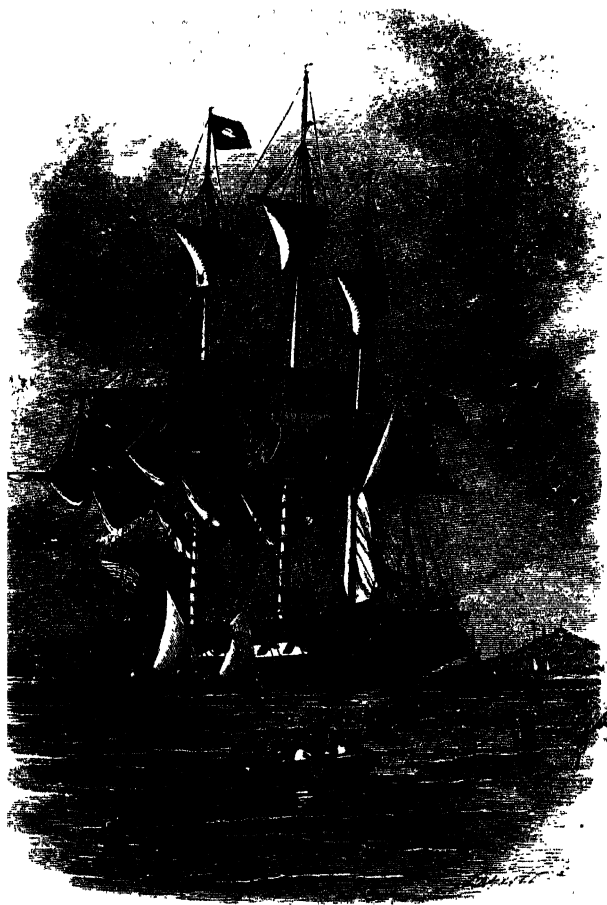
"Well, Mr. Hayward, I'll tell you. We shall have nearly three hundred passengers on board. My third mate will have more than he can do serving out provisions. The lad looks smart and active. Suppose we ship him for the passage as purser's clerk."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hayward. "How do you like the idea, Scudamore?"

"Very much indeed, sir."

"Then run along, and talk it over with Captain Staunton."

I can't describe to you the wild state of excitement which I felt when everything was satisfactorily arranged. I was unfit for any grave sober business, for if I was out in the streets I felt inclined to shout and skip about like a mad man. My liveliness made poor Prawle quite melancholy. "Lucky young rascal!" he muttered; "you'll come home with your pockets full of money, while I shall go on grinding here till I'm as old and as fusty as Parker. I can't stand it much longer—no, I can't. I shall cut and run. I say, Stephen, you must speak a word for me to Captain Staunton. Tell him you know a fellow of priceless value, whose services would be most useful on board the *Ruth Hayward*. Tell him I'm ready for anything. I'll take the command of the ship when he feels lazy, or, if that won't do, I'll feed the ducks and chickens. Stephen, old boy, we mustn't be separated. I can't live without you." And, with these words he embraced me in the public street, putting his red face over my shoulder, and kicking out one leg, as comic actors do on the stage.



THE RUTH HAYWARD

Mr. M'Gaffney was rather sulky when he heard the news. He wrote a long letter to my father, in which he informed him that I was taking a step which would seriously injure my future prospects, and he hinted that, in case I persevered in my foolish enterprise, he should be compelled to demand substantial compensation for the loss of my services. My poor father was so frightened, that he actually wrote a letter asking Mr. M'Gaffney what sum would satisfy him. Luckily my mother intercepted the letter, and forwarded the whole correspondence to Mr. Hayward. A day or two after a confidential clerk from Mr. Hayward's called on Mr. M'Gaffney. I don't know what arguments he used, but we were never afterwards troubled with the claim for compensation.

I then went up to London, and spent a delightful fortnight with my father, mother, and Lucy. My mother was exceedingly busy, preparing and packing my clothes, and buying all sorts of things—which afterwards turned out of little or no use. My father tried to make me understand the elements of geology, which he said I should find of the highest importance; and presented me with an abstruse work on that subject by Sir Roderick Murchison, which he bade me read carefully during the voyage. Lucy and Clara Ainslie and I wandered about the fields, or rode Bruno and Gipsy, who, though older than they used to be, had still plenty of life in them. Indeed, Bruno was as full of mischief as ever, and contrived the very last afternoon I ever rode him to pitch me into a holly-bush. Then came the parting at the North-Western railway station. The scene is still depicted in my mind's eye: Lucy with a brown parasol, Clara with a blue parasol, my mother trying to smile through her tears as she gave me the last kiss at the carriage-window, and one great big tear rolling down

from under my father's spectacles. The remorseless engine shrieked, the guard blew his whistle, and away we went.

Prawle met me at Lime Street. To my surprise his manner was quite resigned and cheerful. "It's all very well for you, Stephen," he said, "who are in the bloom of youth,"—he was barely sixteen himself,—“but I've made up my mind that we old fellows had better stay where we are. Besides, since you left I've been studying M'Caffney's character carefully, and I've discovered new beauties in it of which I was previously unaware. I mean to be contented with my humble lot." There was a curious twinkle in his eye as he said this, but I thought nothing of it; I had mentioned Prawle's wish to Captain Staunton before leaving Liverpool, but he had given me very little encouragement in reply, and I did not care to speak again for fear of giving offence.

At last came the long-expected day of departure. The *Ruth Hayward* hauled out of dock into the stream, and most of the passengers came on board, as it was arranged that the tug steamer should take her in tow the following morning soon after daylight—and daylight comes early in the month of June. Captain Staunton had requested me to come on board the preceding afternoon, telling me, as soon as I arrived to report myself to Mr. Hennessy, the third mate, under whose orders I was to be. In the course of the morning I went round to bid various Liverpool friends good-bye. I called upon Mr. William Hayward, and, after waiting half an hour or so, was fortunate enough to find him disengaged. He received me very cordially, and, repeating his warnings about the dangers and hardships of gold-digging, handed me a letter of introduction to Messrs. Turnbull & Anderson, the firm in Melbourne to whom the *Ruth Hayward* was consigned.

"If you find yourself, Scudamore,—as is not unlikely,—in some great strait, present this letter, and I am sure Mr. Turnbull will help you."

I thanked Mr. Hayward very cordially for his kindness, and then bade him farewell. At the moment of parting he put a little leathern pocket-book into my hand, said that I might find its contents useful, although I was going to the land of gold, and then good-humouredly pushed me out of the office. When I came to examine the pocket-book, I found that it contained ten bright brand new sovereigns. I had never been owner of such a sum of money in all my life, and for a few moments felt an inexpressible desire to buy presents for pater, mater, and Lucy; but after a while, prudence began to prevail, and I stowed the precious little packet away in my securest pocket. I couldn't resist going to St. Ninian's Terrace to bid them good-bye. Mrs. M'Gaffney took me in her arms, and hugged me as if I had been her son three times over; and then Biddy must needs follow her example, and as she had just risen from blackleading the stove, left several marks of her affection on my cheeks. Mr. Toohey, the porter, insisted upon carrying my luggage to the landing-stage, although I assured him that all, excepting a carpet-bag, was already on board. Mr. M'Gaffney, whom I saw for a moment at the office-door, shook my hand quite warmly. He told me that he had for some time been thinking of adding an Australian branch to his emigration business, and that if I chose to accept the Melbourne agency, he would admit me to partnership on very reasonable terms. In my belief, Mr. M'Gaffney would have taken a new-born baby into partnership, if he could have screwed a premium out of its parents and guardians.

But where was Prawle, for whom I cared much more than

for any of these people? Nobody had seen him at the office since nine o'clock in the morning. I went to his uncle's in Williamson Square. He had been there at half past nine o'clock, had astonished his uncle by asking him for the loan of a sovereign, and had afterwards retired rather unwillingly with the borrowed sum of three and eightpence. From that time forwards I could discover no trace of him, and made up my mind that it was rather unkind of him to keep out of the way, instead of coming to bid me good-bye.

I shall not describe the scene of turmoil and confusion which existed on board the *Ruth Hayward*, because I shall have to refer to this subject afterwards. It is enough to say here, that I climbed the ladder which hung over the ship's side, and sought for Mr. Hennessy, the third mate. After some trouble, I found him in the store-room—an apartment about as big as a good-sized cupboard—and at that moment nearly full of boxes, barrels, and parcels, all stowed higgledy-piggledy, everything at top, and nothing at hand. Among these Mr. Hennessy was diving in his shirt-sleeves in hopes of bringing to the surface the articles which he wanted. I at once took off my jacket, and set to work to assist him. We got through a considerable amount of pulling and hauling, and in the course of a couple of hours had reduced the store-room to something like order. By this time it was getting nearly dark : so Mr. Hennessy bade me go to the fore-castle, and tell one of the ship's boys to fetch him a lantern. I swelled with importance on receiving this simple message, but its execution was attended with some difficulties, because I did not know where the fore-castle was, and several of the passengers, who were idling about the decks and of whom I asked the question, appeared no wiser than myself. At last I ob-

tained the required information, and shouted down the dark, fusty-smelling mouth of the fore-castle as Mr. Hennessy had instructed me, "Below, there! Please to send a boy with a lantern to the store-room." Within ten minutes or so, somebody stumbled into the store-room with a lantern in his hand.

"Do you belong to the ship?" asked Mr. Hennessy.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

The tone of the speaker's voice startled me. I looked at his face, and immediately recognized the familiar features of old Johnny Prawle, rigged out in spick-and-span new seaman's toggery.





CHAPTER V.

How Prawle contrived to get on the Ship's Articles—Discovery of Passengers who hoped to get to the Gold Diggings for Nothing—Stormy Weather in the Irish Sea—Singular Scene between Decks—Purser's Work on board an Emigrant Ship—Serving out Stores—Mr. Cripps's "bulling" a Cask—Jackson, the discontented Policeman—A Row on the Forecastle—Striking the Captain—Births and Deaths—Mr. and Mrs. Fish—"No Smoking allowed"—Prawle promoted—What one sees at Sea—The Mysterious Screw-steamer—Land ho!—Arrival in Hobson's Bay—A Run-away, a Chase, and a Capture—The Blue-light Adventure.

"
PRAWLE was not surprised to see me, but I was very much surprised to see him ; in fact, I was so astonished that I let a bar of marine soap fall upon Mr. Hennessy's toes. It was lucky that it was not anything heavier than soap, or he would most likely have boxed my ears, for he was a hot-tempered fellow. As it was, he took it very good-naturedly, and merely bade me be more careful for the future. Prawle made signs that I should take no notice of him, and after asking the mate very respectfully if he had any further orders, walked away. When we had finished our work in the store-room, which was situated in a house on deck provided for the second-class passengers, Mr. Hennessy and I had supper together ; and then he told me that I could do what I pleased till four bells struck—

that is, till ten o'clock—when I had better turn in. I ran away to the main deck, looking anxiously about me. Presently somebody laid a hand on my shoulder. It was Prawle. We strolled to the bulwarks and stood leaning over them, gazing at the glittering lights of the town of Liverpool. My friend then told me his story.

“As soon as I knew that you had made up your mind to go to Melbourne, Stephen, I determined to go too. I had an interview with Captain Staunton: he told me that he couldn't take me except as a passenger. Now the cheapest passage in the steerage is sixteen pounds, a sum of money which I had no chance of raising. ‘Can't I ship as a sailor, sir?’ I asked.

“‘I've got as many boys on board as I want,’ he answered.

“‘I wish you'd take me, sir. My father was a sailor, and I want to be a sailor too.’

“‘Let me see, what's your name?’

“‘John Prawle, sir.’

“‘I served as second mate once under a Captain Prawle, said Captain Staunton.

“‘A short red-faced man, sir?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘That was my father, sir.’

“‘He was a regular Tartar,’ observed Captain Staunton.

“‘So he is still, sir,’ I replied.

“Whereupon the captain burst out laughing, and said—

“‘Come now, my lad, you don't want to be a sailor, you want to go to the diggings; isn't it so?’

“‘Yes, sir.’

“‘Very well. I'll ship you at a shilling a month for the passage. You must sign the articles, and do your duty like anybody else.’

"I accepted the terms, Stephen, and here I am."

"But how did you manage to buy clothes, and so on, Prawle?"

"Well, I disposed of all my superfine wearing-apparel to a Jew in Park Lane, keeping one suit for the colonial Sundays, and with the cash I received and my last month's allowance of pocket-money I contrived to buy my sea-faring kit. I tried to borrow a pound from my uncle, but the stingy old hunk only lent me three and eightpence. At the present moment, Stephen, I am worth fourpence half-penny in copper money; but my heart is light, and with my parting breath I hurl defiance at the firm of Hailes, M'Gaffney, & Co.!"

As he said these words, Prawle made a "long nose" in the direction of Goree Piazzas.

"Won't your father be very angry?"

"Won't he? If he knew I had run away, he would be capable of chartering a steamer out of his next quarter's pension and starting in pursuit. I've written to my mother, but I shan't send the letter till the pilot leaves us."

"And what will she say?"

"She'll take it easy. She doesn't believe in the splendid advantages to be obtained from a residence under Mr. M'Gaffney's roof. My father does. He's just such another old flat as your father, Stephen."

"Thank you," said I, drily.

"And now, Stephen," continued Prawle, "you won't be ashamed of me, will you, because I wear dungaree trousers and scrape the decks, while you mess with the swells of the second cabin?"

"Of course I shan't, old fellow."

"That's right; because, you know, you'll be a valuable

friend now, Stephen. When I wish to vary the monotony of salt pork and salt horse with a handful of raisins or a herring, I shall apply to the Deputy-Assistant Storekeeper-General, eh? There's four bells striking. Don't you envy me in the fore-castle: it's like the Black Hole of Calcutta. Good night."

Mr. Hennessy and I had a snug little room to ourselves in the second cabin. It was originally intended for four berths, but two had been pulled down to afford us accommodation for cigars, spirits, and such-like choice stores as required to be kept under special lock and key. I slept pretty well, but turned out with Mr. Hennessy at four o'clock in the morning, and went on deck.

Almost all the passengers were asleep in their berths below; nevertheless, something remarkable was evidently going on. Mr. Weekes, the chief mate, was standing by the main hatchway, and I observed that the hatch of the lower hold had been removed. Mr. Weekes was a tall bony man, with a long leathery face and a tremendous voice. He was shouting some instructions to the carpenter and boatswain, who were groping about in the hold with lanterns in their hands.

"Bring 'em up, bring every one of 'em up. Fetch me the irons, Mr. Robb" (this was addressed to the second mate); "I'll put 'em all in irons till the steamer comes alongside."

"Now, then, Scudamore, don't stand staring there: the cooks are waiting for their stores," exclaimed Mr. Hennessy, sharply.

Away we went to the store-room, and presently delivered to the cooks a quantity of tea, coffee, beef, pork, and other provisions.

"No measuring or weighing to-day," observed Mr. Hen-

nessy, "we must go by guess. When we are out at sea we shall do things differently."

When I got back to the main deck, about an hour afterwards, I saw an extraordinary sight there. Five miserable half-starved fellows, dressed in the most wretched rags and tatters, sat on the deck, all of a row, with fetters on their hands and feet. Mr. Weekes stood leaning against the mainmast, contemplating them with a grim smile on his face.

"Are these convicts going to Australia, Mr. Hennessy?" I whispered.

"Poor devils!" he replied. "I dare say they wish they were. No; they are stow-aways: people who have hidden themselves among the cargo, in hopes of getting a passage for nothing; but Mr. Weekes has ferreted them out, and they'll be all sent ashore again."

I felt very sorry for these poor creatures. As soon as the tug-steamer arrived, their fetters were knocked off, they were put into a boat and rowed ashore. It seemed so melancholy to think that the greatest punishment they could undergo was being sent back to the shore of Old England, which, to most of us, now that we were leaving it, seemed such a cozy, comfortable place. For days after I seemed to see their doleful, pinched, hungry faces, as the watermen rowed them towards the stony-hearted streets of Liverpool.

Off Formby lightship we cast the tug-boat adrift; our sails were unfurled, and Captain Staunton took the command of the vessel. The wind was strong and adverse. The waves began to rise angrily, and most of the female passengers hurried down below.

"They won't want many stores to-day, Scudamore," said Mr. Hennessy, laughing grimly.

I did not laugh in return, for the pitching of the vessel began to excite uncomfortable sensations in my stomach ; but I did not suffer for very long. I had got over the real deadly sea-sickness when a schoolboy in the Lempriere House boat ; besides, my storekeeping duties gave me constant occupation, and allowed me no time to grow qualmish.

Poor Prawle, though the son of a sea-captain, was not thereby exempted from the attacks of the deadly foe. During the course of the day I saw him hanging over the ship's side with an expression of comic agony on his woe-begone countenance. His complexion remained as red as ever, so that nobody would believe he was sea-sick.

"I say, Stephen," he said, turning on me a pair of dolorous goggle-eyes, "the boatswain swears I'm shamming, and threatens me with the rope's end, the unfeeling monster, just as if my poor head wasn't all mops and brooms."

• He then burst, but, in a very feeble manner, into song :—

" Oh, the sea ! the sea ! the o-o-o-o-pen sea !

The ever fresh——

Ugh ! ugh ! I almost wish I was back at Goree Piazzas, or at Mrs. M'Gaffney's festive board. One always had an appetite there, Stephen ; whereas here——ugh ! ugh ! "

The south-west breeze freshened into a regular summer gale, and for two or three days we were knocking about St. George's Channel, beating down slowly towards the Atlantic and alternately sighting the Welsh and the Irish coasts. This was rather a miserable time : everything on board the ship was in disorder, and the weather was far too rough to allow us to " break " anything out of the hold. The scene between decks was extraordinary, and almost defies description. Probably not one in thirty of the passengers had

ever been on ship-board before—many of them indeed had never set eyes on a ship until their arrival in Liverpool—and they had no notion of making any preparations against the inconveniences caused by the rolling and pitching of the vessel. They fancied, poor simple souls! that if they placed an inanimate object, such as a box or a bag, in any given place, it would stay there. Consequently, when we peeped cautiously between decks, sea-chests, boxes, tin dishes, lamps, chairs, &c., &c., were flying backwards and forwards as if engaged at a game of supernatural leapfrog, while, with pale, terrified faces, the unlucky inhabitants peered out of their berths too sick and frightened to move. Every now and then a box would burst, from the violence of the concussions which it received, and then clothes, tools, books, and all sorts of goods and chattels, were scattered over the cabin. I believe if at that time Captain Staunton had said “Shall I return to Liverpool?” most of the passengers would have eagerly answered “yes!” though perhaps in a few days they would have growled at being taken at their word. During these two or three days we storekeepers had a slack time of it, for nobody, except the sailors, had any appetite, and those of the passengers who were able to nibble a little had provided themselves with private stores of such delicacies as cheese, butter, and bacon, which they naturally preferred to the food supplied by the ship. But when the gale had blown itself out, and was succeeded by a gentle easterly breeze and a bright blue sky, everybody began to revive. Even the women crept on deck, and seeing the Cornish coast looming on our larboard quarter—it was our last sight of English land—some of them inquired very gravely if that was Africa, and were quite disappointed to find that after several days of unutterable misery, they were still within

a few hours' railway journey of the place from which they started.

I shall now endeavour to describe our vessel, the number of passengers, the nature of my duties, and, lastly, to give some account of the incidents which took place during the passage. The *Ruth Hayward* was a full-rigged ship of 1,000 tons register, carrying in her lower hold a cargo of salt, which she was to take on from Melbourne to Calcutta, but otherwise entirely devoted to passengers and their stores. We carried water and provisions for twenty-two weeks, although we hoped to make the passage in less than a hundred days. There were on board nearly four hundred persons, about seventy in the steerage or lowest class—their berths were in the bows of the vessel—two hundred in the intermediate, who were also lodged between decks, about sixty in the second cabin, which consisted of a large house on deck, after the American fashion, and about a dozen in the chief cabin. The officers and crew numbered fifty or sixty persons. Mr. Hernessy's duties were of two kinds. He had to serve out the regular allowance of provisions to the passengers, and to sell certain extra stores to such as chose to buy them. Now, a purser is usually a well-dressed gentleman, who never soils his fingers by touching the provisions, and who sits all day in a little den of an office keeping mysterious accounts. This sort of purser may answer on board a mail-steamer, where the passengers are few in number, and where the provisions are supplied ready-cooked. But on board a merchant ship like the *Ruth Hayward*, carrying emigrants for the first time in her life, and where, consequently, all hands, officers, cooks, and passengers, were equally inexperienced, the purser must strip off his dandy coat, and go to work in earnest. He must descend into the depths of the hold, and penetrate

the mysteries of the cook's galley. As for my post, it was no place for glazed boots and kid gloves. My week-day costume consisted of an old wide-awake hat, a pair of canvas trousers, and a blue jersey, and these used to get pretty well besmeared with flour and molasses. The chief cabin and the second cabin were easily managed, as their respective stewards took their provisions in a lump, and served them out ready-cooked ; but the passengers between decks were divided into messes, usually consisting of eight persons each, and each mess was expected to choose a captain, whose business it was to come at the appointed hour for his supply of stores. These messes used to fight and squabble dreadfully among themselves, their captains were always being deposed and re-elected, but at last Mr. Hennessy got them into working order. My work was pretty severe. Mr. Hennessy roused me at half-past five. We then served out stores till breakfast-time, and again after breakfast till twelve. At twelve o'clock we ceased serving out stores, and opened shop for an hour, during which time we sold ale and porter, wine, tobacco, cigars, and sundry other articles. During the voyage we disposed at our diminutive counter of nearly £800 worth of goods, and a great deal of the money received was copper, which we kept in buckets in the captain's cabin. In the afternoon there was more serving out of stores. Shop again from five to six, and then, after tea, I used to help Mr. Hennessy with his accounts till eight or nine o'clock. Even on Sundays we were obliged to keep shop as usual, but no stores were served out. Although the hours were long for a lad of fifteen, there were a good many breaks. Most of our work was done in the open air, and I enjoyed every scrap of leisure with a zest which an unemployed person cannot feel. The passengers often

used to say, with a weary yawn, "I wish I were in your shoes, young fellow. You are always busy, and always happy."

The stores were served out on the main deck. I collected the tickets and called out the amounts, Mr. Hennessy weighed the quantities in a large pair of scales, and Cripps, of whom I shall speak again presently, shovelled the articles out of box, bag, or cask, as the case might be. In fine weather, barring occasional rows with nasty-tempered passengers, this work was pleasant enough; but when we got into the high southern latitudes, with a strong breeze blowing, a heavy sea rolling, and the deck slippery with salt water, or half-melted snow, some curious scenes used to occur. Sometimes when the ship gave a more than usually heavy roll, all the passengers who were waiting to be served would come flying, against their will, across the deck, knocking over weights, scales, provisions, purser, and assistants. Mr. Cripps used to get very wroth at being capsized in this summary fashion, for he was a veteran seaman, and could not excuse anybody for losing his footing, however rough the weather might be. So he used to rise out of a confused heap of heads and limbs, hitting out lustily with his clenched fists, without mercy, at everything that came in his way. Cripps had been a master of a vessel in his day, but, in his old age, had come down in the world, and was now glad to get some reduction made in the price of his passage-money—for he was going to settle in Victoria with his wife and children—by acting as a sort of scrub under Mr. Hennessy. He was a most honest, handy old fellow, and might have been safely trusted with bags of gold and silver,—but not with grog. One day, I remember, Mr. Hennessy and I had been bottling off a barrel of whisky. As soon as the job was done, old Cripps got hold of the empty barrel, saying to

me, "Look here, Mr. Scudamore, I'll show you how to make a 'bull' of this." He took out the bung, poured about a quart of water into the cask, replaced the bung, and then perseveringly rolled the cask about the deck for half an hour. The result of all this shaking was that the water became strongly impregnated with spirit, and that, when Mr. Cripps's services were required later in the day, he was discovered fast asleep and snoring upon a bag of biscuits under the main hatchway, with an empty bottle at his side. I spoke, just now, of rows caused by disagreeable passengers. When we first began serving out stores there was a general impression that Mr. Hennessy would, if he could, cheat the people out of their allowance, and some of them used to bring weights and scales of their own on deck, as a check against us. After a few days, however, most of the passengers discovered that Mr. Hennessy was scrupulously honest; they soon ceased to trouble themselves about the scales, and trusted us implicitly. The only exception was a man named Jackson, a very tall, thin, lantern-jawed Irishman, who had been, it was said, a Liverpool policeman. His wife was always below, being continually seasick, and Jackson was perpetually stalking about the deck with a long-legged twin-child on either arm. He was a most attentive nurse, but a terrible grumbler, for every day he swore that he had been cheated out of his allowance. Mr. Hennessy cured him in this manner. He compelled him to watch most narrowly the operation of weighing every one of his articles, and before three weeks had passed Mr. Jackson was so tired of the job, and so jeered at, and sneered at, by his impatient fellow-passengers, that he never again opened his mouth, and became as meek as a lamb.

Considering the number of passengers we had on board, that most of them were entire strangers to each other, and

that they came from all parts of the United Kingdom, we had not much squabbling or fighting, except in the messes. This was greatly owing to Captain Staunton's good management. He was a fair-dealing, just, kind-hearted man, always ready to listen patiently to any complaint; but when he put his foot down, as the Yankees say, he was resolved to be obeyed. There were two Roman Catholic priests on board, and they asked to be allowed to celebrate mass on Sunday in the second cabin. Captain Staunton granted the permission, but presently they complained that some foolish fellows came and made fun of their religious observances. The chief mate was ordered to keep watch; he caught two of the ringleaders, and they were put in irons for the whole of the following afternoon. The service was never again disturbed. It was rather curious that while almost all the Irish on board were zealous Protestants from Ulster, the Roman Catholics were nearly all Englishmen from Preston, in Lancashire. Another disturbance was rather more serious. The intermediate passengers were very jealous of the second cabin; because the latter were allowed the privilege of walking on the poop, from which they were debarred, and in return they used to declare that no cabin passengers had any right on the fore-castle. One beautiful moonlight night, after we had entered the tropics, a number of Northumberland men were celebrating a birthday in the fore-castle, drinking toasts and singing songs. Some of the second-cabin passengers went forward to see the fun. The Northumberland men refused to let them come on the fore-castle, and when some of them persisted in climbing up, they were summarily pitched on to the main deck, receiving some cut heads and bruises from this rough usage. They at once came aft, and summoned their fellow-passengers to assist them. Presently a

regular scrimmage began. The second cabin, forty or fifty strong, endeavoured to dislodge the Northumbrians from their fortifications. Sticks were freely used, and bottles thrown about. The row grew so serious that Mr. Hennessy bade me run down to the chief cabin and call up the captain. In a few minutes I saw his gigantic form—he was a head taller than any of the combatants—stalking calmly into the thick of the fray. At sight of the skipper most of the faction-fighters turned and fled; but one man, in the heat of the struggle, absolutely struck Captain Staunton a violent blow in the chest. I saw the deed with my own eyes, and regarded the offence as little short of high treason. The captain dragged out the offender by the collar of his coat, though he was a good-sized fellow, as easily as a mastiff tackles a bull terrier. I verily expected to see a line run up to the yardarm, and the criminal swung in the air. The captive turned out to be a rather silly, but gentlemanlike young fellow who went by the name of Midshipman Green, because he had formerly served aboard a vessel belonging to the shipowners so named. This made his offence worse, for, as a seaman, he must have known how serious a crime it is to use violence to a commanding officer. But as he appeared extremely penitent, vowed that he only hit out at random in the heat of the fray, and that he would not have struck Captain Staunton, knowingly, for all the gold in Australia, our worthy skipper dismissed him with a reprimand, and returned, with a placid smile on his broad face, to the charts which he had been consulting down below.

Half a dozen children were born on the passage,—one of them, I recollect, was christened Indiana Marina, because she came into the world when we were crossing the Indian Ocean,—and three or four persons died. Mr. Hennessy, who

was a man of superior education, used to act as chaplain on these occasions. I remember one Sunday, the people had preserved meat for dinner, and as they had a difficulty in opening the tins, Mr. Hennessy was doing it for them with one of the peculiarly shaped knives used for the purpose. He was dressed in his working costume—a blue serge shirt and a pair of dirty duck trousers. Presently a message came from the captain that he wished the funeral—it was that of a young woman—to take place at once, as the barometer was falling, and a gale of wind likely to come on. Hennessy immediately ran away to his cabin, and reappeared ten minutes afterwards dressed in a suit of decent black, with a prayer-book in his hand. He then read the service with great feeling and reverence. Such ceremonies are obliged to be performed rapidly on board ship. On this occasion, the poor girl's body had scarcely been committed to the deep, when Captain Staunton shouted, "Stand by the main-top-gallant halyards," and presently afterwards a heavy squall burst upon us.

We were very fortunate in escaping all contagious sickness. There are two calamities which are far more to be dreaded on board ship than storm and tempest, and these are—epidemic disease and fire. As for the latter, the wonder to me is, not that ships are sometimes burnt, but that so many escape burning. Although naked lights are strictly forbidden between decks on board passenger-ships, the rule is constantly evaded. It is so pleasant in cold rough weather to lie reading in your berth; and the oil-lamps provided by the ship are generally most wretched glimmering affairs, barely making darkness visible. But what the terrors of Mr. Weekes's big bullying voice were unable to accomplish, was effected by the ingenuity of one of the passengers. He perceived that nearly everybody on

board was provided with candles, but that very few possessed lamps. Being a tin-plate worker by trade, he hastened to remedy the defect; and, by the aid of some sheets of tin which he had in his chest, and some white glass spirit-bottles, he constructed a number of convenient lamps, which sold very readily after being submitted to the captain's approval. Tobacco-smoking is another practice which is supposed to be forbidden between decks; but the rule was constantly broken. I have seen a half-tipsy fellow staggering about between decks with his lighted pipe turned upside down, so that at every few steps he dropped particles of red-hot tobacco. I have seen another man, out of sheer carelessness, throw a lighted match behind a box: on the box being pulled out from its place, a heap of dry straw was found between it and the cabin-partition, all ready for taking fire. The chief mate, Mr. Weekes, and the doctor, Mr. Salter, were very particular about cleanliness, and I have no doubt this saved us from fever and other contagious diseases. Every passenger was furnished with an iron instrument called a scraper, with which he was expected to scrape the floor round his berth; and if this was not done to Mr. Weekes's satisfaction, he used to forbid the cook to issue any breakfast to the passengers. You can fancy how savage the hungry passengers between decks used to get, when they found that they could not obtain a drop of tea or coffee because, perhaps, one lazy fellow had neglected his scraping. In such a case, the delinquent either received a good pummelling at the hands of his shipmates, or, if he was really incapacitated by sickness, somebody else would undertake the job, for the sake of getting his own breakfast.

Mr. Salter was equally particular in compelling all the passengers to bring their beds and bedding on deck directly

after breakfast, except when the weather was bad. The doctor had made several voyages on board the New York emigrant-ships, was a strict disciplinarian, and kept everybody in excellent order, except one couple, of whom the whole ship,¹ including even Captain Staunton himself, stood in mortal terror. Mr. Fish was a middle-aged man, lean and sunburnt, who always dressed in the colonial fashion, wearing a blue serge shirt and a cabbage-tree hat; Mrs. Fish, his wife, was a stout lady, with a broad, coarse face, who looked more like a man than a woman. In rough weather, she wore a pea-jacket, and used to be fond of leaning against the big water-tank, with her legs crossed and her arms folded, puffing away at a short black pipe, and gossiping with the sailors. It was reported that Mr. Fish had been transported for life, that he had secretly visited England to inquire about some property, and was now returning to his adopted country. I hardly know why Mr. Fish inspired such terror, for he was a silent and reserved man, except it was that he had a way of mysteriously threatening to "do" for people when he got ashore, which was decidedly unpleasant, for we greenhorns naturally thought that perhaps everybody in the colony belonged to the Fish tribe. Several times he threatened Mr. Hennessy's life and mine, and he knew how to overcome Dr. Salter. He once came to our store, saying:—

"My old woman's very bad in her inside, and when she's bad in her inside, nothing will cure her but brandy and pepper."

Mr. Hennessy replied civilly, for, as he was going to settle in the colony, he had no desire to make an enemy of Mr. Fish: "I can give you the pepper, but I can't sell spirits to a third-class passenger without an order from the doctor."

Mr. Fish went away, obtained the order, and whenever Mrs. Fish's pain returned, which it did every few days, he always applied for the same remedy. Don't let me accuse Salter of cowardice. Even Captain Staunton, though a giant in stature, allowed that he trembled before Mrs. Fish. As I have already observed, the doctor was very severe in prohibiting smoking between decks, and in compelling all passengers to turn out of their berths and roll up their beds at seven a.m. Yet one day, Mr. Hennessy and I, who were busy "breaking out" stores from the hold, overheard the following dialogue:—

Salter. "Mrs. Fish!"

Mrs. F. (*in a deep masculine voice*). "Hallo! doctor."

S. "You're in bed, Mrs. Fish."

Mrs. F. "I know I am, doctor."

S. "It's against the rules, Mrs. Fish."

Mrs. F. "I don't care if it is, doctor."

S. "And you are smoking, Mrs. Fish."

Mrs. F. "I know I am, doctor."

S. "You must put out your pipe, Mrs. Fish."

Mrs. F. "I shan't, doctor."

And then we heard poor Salter steal softly away without another word, followed by a derisive chuckle from the fair lady inside.

I have not said a word all this time about my friend Prawle. I don't think, if he had remained at sea, he would have been likely to make a first-rate seaman. But he assured me that it was impossible to get up any enthusiasm for the nautical profession on such wretched nominal wages as a shilling a month. *

"When we go aloft," he said, "to shorten sail, you won't find me stretched out on the yardarm, because I might drop into the sea, and so lose my valuable life. I take

care to remain in the 'slings,' and if I drop out of them, I charitably hope I may drop on to the boatswain and bruise him severely. He's very cruel to me, Stephen; he is prejudiced against my long legs, and he insults the ruddy tint of my complexion by calling me 'Butcher.'"

I suspect the boatswain thought Prawle a bit of a humbug; for one day when we were all hauling in the main-brace, and Prawle was shouting "Hey, ho, cheerly men!" at the top of his voice, I heard the boatswain say, gruffly, "Less noise and more work, Butcher; you're not pulling an ounce."

But after a time poor Prawle was appointed to more congenial duties. When we got into the hot latitudes, and the people grew thirsty, great complaints arose as to the manner in which the water was served out. Every one had a right to three quarts a day, the greater part of which, however, went to the cook for making tea and coffee. As for the remainder, people declared that some got far more than their share, and that some got none at all. Angry deputations visited the captain on the quarter-deck, and he promised that the abuse should be set right. In the course of the day, Prawle went aft, and respectfully touching his cap, presented a paper to the captain. It was a neatly-compiled statement, showing the exact amount of water due to each mess or family throughout the ship after the cook's allowance had been deducted. Captain Staunton sent for Mr. Hennessy, and handing him the paper, asked him if it was correctly drawn up. Mr. Hennessy examined it carefully, and replied that it was.

"Then give that lad Prawle," replied the captain, "the key of the water-tank; we'll see if he can give the passengers satisfaction."

At first there was a great deal of grumbling; but when

they saw that Prawle was determined to treat everybody fairly, they became more satisfied, and he retained his post—Chief Controller of the Pump-handle, as he styled himself—until we reached Melbourne.

I am inclined to think that tales of sea life and adventure, especially those which are expressly written for boys, convey very false impressions of the reality. The writers of such books do not perhaps relate anything that never actually happened, but they crowd into the story of one voyage all the wonderful experiences of a hundred voyages. The consequence is that when boys go to sea for the first time, they are disappointed to find how few wonderful things there really are to be seen. The outward incidents of the ninety days on board the *Ruth Hayward* may be dismissed in a few lines. Sometimes a shoal of flying-fish rose athwart the bows of the ship; and once—I think only once—a solitary specimen fell on the deck, and lay flapping there, unable to rise. We saw a good many porpoises in the Bay of Biscay. I like to watch the fat black oily rascals tumbling head over heels, they seem so full of enjoyment. Now and then we saw a distant whale spouting, and once we spied a great turtle swimming along—I saw him through Mr. Hennessy's telescope.

In the high southern latitudes animal life becomes more abundant. A flock of albatrosses, mollyhawks, and Cape pigeons follow the ship perseveringly, although the guns of the passengers are perpetually wreaking death and destruction among them. It seems a shame to kill these poor creatures, for we had no retriever dogs on board, and even if we had, the captain would scarcely have stopped his ship to allow some Cockney sportsman to secure his booty. I have often been surprised to think of the distances which such birds as the albatross can fly without fatigue. When a ship is

"fluking" along before a westerly gale at the rate of 250 or 270 miles a day these birds keep deliberately circling round and round her, accomplishing at least twice her distance in the same length of time ; then they quietly perch on a wave, put their heads under their wings, and go to sleep for the night. Once or twice we caught an albatross with hook and line. Their immense size and stretch of wing astonish the person who for the first time sees them close at hand. When they are flying around the ship they look comparatively small ; but in the open sea the eye is easily deceived about size and distance. As for the Cape pigeons, everybody has heard, over and over again, how the poor creatures become sick the moment they touch the deck, and how they vomit pure oil from their stomachs. In these latitudes the black fish, a small species of whale, is found. We once fell in with a whole "school" of them. It was really a striking and magnificent sight to see thousands of these great creatures jumping out of the water, and performing all sorts of acrobatic antics on every side of us. I will only mention one other incident. We got rather close in to the eastern coast of Africa, near Cape de Verde, and were becalmed there for three tedious days. During the calm a vessel hove in sight on the extreme edge of the horizon.

The captain pronounced her to be a screw-steamer. She vanished when night came on, but the next day reappeared on the other side of us, so much nearer that we could read signals with a telescope. Captain Staunton hoisted his number, but the stranger made no response. As she kept standing off and on in rather a peculiar way, and as there was not a breath of wind to stir our sails, Captain Staunton grew a little uneasy. He ordered the brass three-pounders—intended for ornament more than use—to be loaded and

shot, and he bade the carpenter take down and put in order a dozen old-fashioned fowling-pieces and cutlasses that hung round the chief cabin. Now, if I were relating a romance instead of a literal transcript of my own adventures, I should go on to describe how the stranger drew cautiously nearer and nearer ; how she at length fired a shot across our bows ; how we returned fire with one of our popguns, which only carried a couple of hundred yards ; how the stranger hoisted a black flag with a death's-head and cross-bones on it, and lowered a boat full of armed men ; how, just as they drew alongside, we judiciously dropped a round shot out of the mizen chains and sank her to the bottom ; lastly, how a breeze sprang up and we sailed triumphantly away. Such a yarn as this was related only a few months ago in the *Times* newspaper, and professed to be the genuine experiences of a passenger between London and Melbourne ; but as I never heard anything more about it, I suspect it was a hoax. In our case you may fancy that the passengers, especially the women, got terribly alarmed, and made up their minds that they would be murdered and thrown into the sea by those bloodthirsty pirates. But no such tragical events happened. On the second evening the mysterious stranger was still in sight ; but next morning she had disappeared, and we never saw her again.

Now what was she, and why did she advance and retire as if she were setting to us in a great nautical quadrille ? I cannot satisfactorily answer these questions ; but I remember hearing that Captain Staunton pronounced her to be a slaver waiting for an opportunity to make the coast, but afraid of the British squadron. Perhaps at first she took us for a man-of-war ; then afterwards, on discovering her mistake, she amused herself by trying to frighten us in

revenge for our having frightened her. I have sometimes wondered that no daring pirate has ever attempted to surprise a homeward-bound Australian clipper laden with gold. Such a vessel would form as rich a prize as one of the Spanish galleons coveted in the sixteenth century by Drake and Frobisher. I suspect that the security of ships in modern days is caused thus: it would be easy enough for a well-armed screw-clipper to plunder a poor defenceless merchantman, but what would be the use of the plunder? Pirates must go somewhere ashore to enjoy their ill-gotten gold, and wherever they went in these days they would be liable to capture. They would be placed in the same difficulty as the Confederate cruisers during the late American war—they would have no port open for their prizes.

Though we had traversed half the circumference of the globe, we had sighted no solid earth since our last view of the rocky coast of Cornwall, with the exception of a distant glimpse of the Peak of Teneriffe, which to my landsman's eyes looked more like a cloud than a mountain. I was delighted, therefore, one September morning to be aroused by shouts of "Land ho!" I hurried on deck, and though the day was only just breaking, found an eager line of passengers already leaning over the bulwarks discussing the outward appearance of the country where they all hoped to make their fortunes. I was surprised to find our good ship so close in shore. The coast was not more than a mile distant, and with yards sharply braced up we were standing right in. Presently, Captain Staunton gave the signal to 'bout ship, and then some of our wiseacres declared that he had only just discovered the perilous position in which we were placed, and that in a few moments more we should have been upon the rocks. Mr. Hennessy

afterwards explained to me the truth of the matter. The land before us was Cape Northumberland, just on the frontier line between South Australia and Victoria, a favourite point of approach for navigators making the Australian coast, just as the Start Point in Devonshire is frequently the first landmark of homeward-bounders. During the night the fair westerly wind which we had carried for weeks had fallen light and dropped into a calm. This was succeeded by a light breeze from E.S.E.; consequently we were no longer able to keep on our course, but were obliged to beat to windward, and we had just completed our allotted shoreward tack, when Captain Staunton gave the order to go about. Of course we "new chums,"—and nearly all the passengers on board the *Ruth Hayward*, except Mr. and Mrs. Fish, were new chums—of course we all looked with great interest on the first bit of Australian land. We were rather glad to find that it did not look at all like the white cliffs of old England. The shore was high and bluff, of a dark red colour, and trees and thick bushes grew down to the very edge of the cliff. No trace of any human habitation was visible, but this did not prove that the country was untenanted by civilized men. On a certain occasion a ship-captain who had never visited Australia before, landed on this coast to see if he could obtain any meat, as his barrels of beef and pork were almost expended. He saw no signs of human beings, but discovered a flock of fine fat sheep. Regarding them as animals providentially placed in an uninhabited region for the benefit of poor hungry mariners, he shot several of the "woolly birds," as he called them, and carried their carcasses triumphantly back to the ship. He was rather astonished, upon his arrival at Melbourne, to find that the news of his raid had got there before him, and that an action for

damages had been entered against him in one of the law courts. The shepherd in charge of the sheep had witnessed his high-handed proceedings, but being afraid to interfere with a party of armed men had hidden himself, and reported the robbery to his employer.

After a three months' passage, during the latter part of which we had encountered light baffling winds, we reached Port Phillip Heads. The appearance of that now celebrated inlet was not very cheering. The coast was barren, treeless, and forbidding; while the reefs on either side of the entrance—for the actual passage is not more than a mile in width—were ornamented with the skeletons of several unlucky vessels which had stranded there. When the pilot came on board, everybody crowded round him to hear the news. The chief news was that a new gold-field of extraordinary richness had been discovered on the Bendigo Creek. Next day we proceeded up the port—a fine basin of water forty miles across, and anchored in Hobson's Bay, at a considerable distance, however, from the shore, for fear any of the crew should desert. One of the first sights, indeed, which met our eyes, was enough to strike terror to the heart of a master-mariner. Before us lay a whole fleet of noble merchantmen, without any sailors on board. A melancholy mate or sullen steward might be seen apathetically pacing the deck, cursing the day which ever brought them to such an inhospitable country; the crews were all scattered over the face of the land seeking for nuggets, while the captain was wandering up and down Flinders-street—the Ratcliff Highway of Melbourne—entering public-houses, offering sailors £100 and upwards for the "run" home, and encountering in return, jibes and jeers, and flourishings of dirty bundles of one-pound notes within an inch of his nose. The temptation to desert was certainly

very great. Most of these men, even if able seamen, had shipped at wages not exceeding £3. 10s. a month. Supposing the total voyage lasted ten months, that is, from Liverpool to Melbourne, from Melbourne to Calcutta, and from Calcutta home, they would not have more than £35 to receive ; whereas, by deserting at Melbourne, they had the chance of making a golden fortune at the diggings, or even if that didn't answer, they could return in another ship, taking care that their own captain was out of the way, and earn three or four years' ordinary wages in as many months.

In those days, before the Hobson's Bay railway was constructed, the city of Melbourne was an awkward place to get at from the sea, as it was built up a narrow winding river, with a nine-foot sand-bar across its mouth. All cargo was brought to the town in lighters, while passengers and their luggage were, for the most part, conveyed in steamers, about as small and as dirty as our tug-boats. The captains of these steamers were very independent fellows, who stayed a very short time alongside any particular ship, in order that they might visit as many ships as possible during the day. When they came alongside, a tremendous scuffling and confusion ensued. Everybody tried to lower his baggage on to the steamer's paddle-box at once, and a good many packages were tumbled down anyhow, so that they split open and their contents were discharged into the water. I remember seeing boots and shoes, children's hats, hair-brushes, and all sorts of articles thus floating in the waters of the bay. The poor half-frantic owner had no means of recovering them, and they generally fell a prize to some piratical waterman, whose boat was lurking hard by. During one of these steamboat visits, one Spiller, a man who had been a London postman, quitted the *Ruth Hayward*.

Mr. Spiller had a wife and seven children, the eldest of whom was a very nice-looking girl. But if, on this occasion, our officers had watched the ex-postman's family closely, they would have seen that he had *eight* children, and that his eldest daughter was not particularly pretty. A few hours later, when it was too late, the truth was discovered. Mr. Robb, our second mate, a sober, steady young Scotchman, had fallen in love during the passage with Miss Emma Spiller. He could not bear to part with her, and he longed to try his luck at the diggings. So he shaved off his whiskers, disguised himself in Emma's bonnet, shawl, and petticoats, and got clear away. I met him a year or two afterwards working as a tent-maker. He then told me that he bitterly repented having deserted from the *Ruth Hayward*, and that it was the worst day's work he had ever done. Every sailor was not so lucky as to have a sweetheart to dress him up in feminine attire, and as we had sentries posted at the gangway, it was not easy to escape.

Some of our men, however, had made up their minds to get away, and as they could not manage it by fraud, they resolved to do it openly. Just as one of these steamers was sheering off from the vessel, twelve of our crew sprang from the bulwarks on to the paddle-box, and ran below, hiding themselves, by the ready connivance of the engine-men, in the stokehole. Mr. Weekes, the chief mate, and Chips, the carpenter, leapt on board after them, and insisted that the steamboat captain should stop his craft, and deliver up the fugitives. He poured forth a torrent of bad language in reply, flatly refusing to do anything of the kind, while a gang of blackguards got round our officers, put their fists in their faces, and threatened that if they did not keep quiet they would fling them overboard. It was a

most exciting scene, but Captain Staunton could do nothing to help our two faithful emissaries, who were thus fighting his battle against a host of enemies, because the steamer was by this time a cable's length from the ship. As the steamer sheered off we got a parting glimpse of Mr. Weekes and the carpenter. They were leaning resolutely against the boiler, and presenting their pistols in the faces of their antagonists.

"What will happen?" I heard Mr. Hennessy ask the captain.

"Unless they murder Weekes," answered Captain Staunton, calmly, "he'll get the best of them. He is one of the most determined men I ever knew. The steamboat captain knows well that the law is against him. He is bound, at the request of my officers, to hoist the signal for the Water Police from Williamstown, to come on board."

We watched the departing steamer with eager eyes, for we felt great fear that our two plucky fellows would be ill-used, if not murdered; when, just as she entered the mouth of the Yarra Yarra, the villanous little steamer began blowing off steam, and a minute afterwards the police signal flew to the top of her grimy mast. Soon after, a long black boat full of armed men, shot out from the Williamstown shore, and presently we had the satisfaction of seeing a dozen black dots dropped down the steamer's side into the boat. These were our runaway sailors, who were kept on shore in durance vile until the ship was ready to sail for Calcutta, were then brought on board in irons, and were not released till the ship was outside the Heads. Poor wretches! Although in what I have just written I seem to have taken the captain's part against the crew, I felt sorry for them. The temptation was tremendous, almost irresistible. I think shipowners acted at that time stingily and foolishly. They

would have done better to authorize their captains to pay all men who stuck faithfully by the ship double or triple wages for the run home. If they had done this, there would not have been hundreds of ships lying for weeks and months in Hobson's Bay "eating their heads off," as the saying is ; for few masters of vessels had such good luck as Captain Staunton, who recaptured all his runaways except the second mate.

I have often since thought that it would have been a good thing if all captains could have imitated one Petrie, who was not only the master, but the principal owner of the vessel which he sailed. On arriving in Port Phillip, and finding that everybody had gone mad on the subject of gold, he called all the hands aft, and addressed them thus :—

"If there's any one here who wants to go to the gold diggings, let him hold up his hand."

Every sailor on board elevated his hand at these words.

• "Ho ! ho !" said Captain Petrie, cheerfully, "you all want to go, do you ?"

"Ay, sir."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll lay the old barque up in the bay, put somebody aboard to take care of her, we'll go up to the diggings in a body, and we'll all share and share alike !"

The proposal was received with acclamations ; three ringing cheers were given for Captain Petrie, and, what is best of all, the idea was practically carried out. The whole ship's company went to the diggings, worked amicably together for some months, and then brought their united spoils contentedly on board ship.

The cunning departure of Mr. Robb, a man who was expected by everybody to stick to the *Ruth Hayward* like

a barnacle, and the open flight of twelve foremast hands, made Captain Staunton very anxious and suspicious. As soon as the sun went down, a watch was organized, composed of everybody who could be trusted. Nobody before the mast, I am sorry to say, was reckoned trustworthy in this respect, and the chief mate and carpenter were ashore ; so the Vigilance Committee consisted of Captain Staunton, Mr. Salter, the surgeon, Mr. Hennessy, the third mate, three apprentice boys, the Deputy-Assistant Storekeeper-General, commonly called Steve Scudamore ; and last, but assuredly not least, Mr. John Prawle, formerly of Goree Piazzas, Liverpool, but lately Director of the Waterworks on board the A 1 British-built ship *Ruth Hayward*. When Mr. Hennessy gravely clapped a pistol in each of our youthful fists, I do believe we swelled to twice our actual size ; but our pride was somewhat abated by the thought that the honour and glory of carrying firearms loaded with ball in defence of Captain Staunton's vessel was shared by three 'prentice lads.

The captain was well aware that as soon as it grew dark there would be plenty of boats plying among the shipping in the bay, with the view of inveigling ashore their crews, who were only too willing to run away. Accordingly, we kept strict watch throughout the night, and as the sky was moonless and overcast, nothing could be seen at a very short distance from the ship. Our crew, with the exception of the twelve runaways, who were by this time cooling their unlucky heels in the lock-up in Williamstown, were supposed to be all fast asleep in their bunks in the forecastle, but in reality, no doubt, most of them were full dressed, and had their kits made up in a bundle, in case any chance of bolting should present itself. Prawle proved himself a very valuable watchman ; for his great goggle eyes had the

peculiarity, like those of a cat, of shining in the dark, and he could see things which nobody else could. During the darkest part of the night—namely, the hour before dawn, the watch on deck was in the hands of Mr. Hennessy, Prawle, and myself. Presently Mr. Hennessy made a signal for silence, and then whispered: “I hear muffled oars coming towards the ship!” He pointed in the direction of the bows. We all crept softly thither, stooping beneath the bulwarks, so that the crew of the approaching boat might not discover that anybody on board was on the look-out. As we passed the forecastle we observed that there was a light burning there, which was extinguished as soon as our footsteps were heard. This showed that our sailors were awake, and that they were probably expecting some one coming from the shore to set them at liberty. It afterwards struck me that if they had chosen they might easily have overpowered one man and two boys, but most likely they could not depend on one another. Besides, sailors are not such fools as people are apt to fancy. Running away from on board ship is a small offence, and punishable at the utmost by six weeks’ imprisonment, supposing the deserters refuse to return to their work; whereas using violence to an officer engaged in the execution of his duty is a serious matter, and only too frequently ends in murder.

To return to my narrative. Mr. Hennessy crept like a cat along the bowsprit, bidding us follow him. I was an expert climber, and went readily after him, but Prawle did not undertake the job very willingly. As he afterwards observed, “Though I may have the eyes of a cat, Stephen, I have the long and somewhat awkward legs of a human being unaccustomed to gymnastics; and then I had to consider how precious my life was to the skipper. I might have

tumbled overboard and he would have lost my invaluable services just when they were most wanted."

"It's so confoundedly dark," whispered Mr. Hennessy, presently, "that I can see nothing."

"I can," said Prawle. "I can see a six-oared boat, full of armed men, under the larboard chains."

As soon as these words were spoken, Mr. Hennessy bade us clamber back to the forecastle. Presently I heard a scratching sound, as if a lucifer match was being struck. A few moments afterwards, the brilliant flame of a blue light which Mr. Hennessy had stuck into a belaying-pin-hole, shot into the air, illuminating the sea for yards around, and rendering our would-be assailants clearly visible, as Prawle had correctly stated, under the larboard chains.

"Now then, my lads," sung out Mr. Hennessy to the boatmen below, "do you want a twenty-four pound shot dropped into your midships? Sheer off, or I'll sink you." As he spoke he exhibited a large round thing which he held in his hands.

The fellows in the boat muttered several curses expressive of disappointment, but one man in the stern sheets called out :

"This here vessel's the *Pride of the Seas*, ain't she, from Hobart Town?"

"No," replied Mr. Hennessy ; "the *Ruth Hayward* from Liverpool."

"Ah ! then ; we've made a mistake, that's all. My eyesight's bad by night."

"Mine happens to be particularly good by night, gentlemen," cried Prawle, just showing his nose over the bulwarks. He spoke in such a comical voice, that even the disappointed jack-tar hunters burst out laughing.

"Well, I'm sorry you ain't the *Pride of the Seas*," rejoined the steersman of the boat in a persuasive voice; "if you were, I've got a quarter of fresh beef, a sack of potatoes, and a barrel of ale for you."

"It won't do, my lads," said Hennessy. "We don't take stores in at dead of night. Sheer off, or down goes this twenty-four pounder among you."

"Give way, my lads," said the steersman, sullenly. When he had got to a safe distance he roared out: "Confound you for a set of lime-juicing humbugs."

The colonial seamen term a long-voyage ship which trades to Europe or America, a lime-juicer, because on board such vessels that valuable commodity is served out by Act of Parliament to prevent scurvy.

When the sound of the oars of the piratical craft had died away in the distance, Mr. Hennessy, with a dry laugh, struck a match, and exhibited his twenty-four pound cannon-ball.

It was only a "fender," one of those bags of canvas stuffed with oakum, which are used by ships in port and elsewhere to save their sides from being bruised. A quartern loaf, flung into the boat, would have done as much damage.





CHAPTER VI.

Captain Staunton's Proposal—Selling a Box of Clothes—Disappearance of Donnithorne—A Scene at the Melbourne Hospital—We drink Mr. Gregory's Health—Prawle is taken in and done for—Clutterbuck's Boarding-house—Shying a Boot at the crazy Doctor—The first Day in a Tent—A Picnic Dinner—Fetching Wood and Water—The Woman of the Tree—I am benighted—A Shot from a Revolver—Quarrel between Prawle and the Greenwich Man—The Reconciliation—A Visit from a supposed Bushranger—The Story of the Woman of the Tree.

THE *Ruth Hayward* had lain at anchor for several days in Hobson's Bay before I had any chance of getting ashore. After three months at sea it was rather tantalizing to be within sight of Australian houses, to be able to see Australian colonists walking about the beach, and to be eating bread baked only the day before by Australian bakers, and yet to be still confined to the narrow limits of the ship. But although the passengers were rapidly leaving us, and although very few stores had to be served out, there was still a good deal of work to be done in our department. The accounts had to be made up carefully, so as to show the exact amount of money which we had received by our sales, and the precise quantity of stores still remaining on board the ship. As provisions of all sorts were very dear in Port Phillip, Captain Staunton proposed to sell the greater part of his

surplus stores to a ship-chandler in Williamstown, and of course it was necessary to know the quantity which he had remaining. Mr. Hennessy was a very conscientious man ; he had been brought up as an apprentice on board Messrs. Haywards' ships, and he would have considered it an act of ingratitude to quit the vessel until he had left everything under his charge in apple-pie order. Otherwise I know that he was longing to get away, for, as I have already observed, he was going to give up the seafaring profession, and join a brother who had settled in the colony as a farmer. But although we were still confined to the ship, we heard a good deal of news from the shore, as passengers were perpetually coming and going until they had got all their baggage away. As for Prawle, he got his discharge the day after our arrival. Anybody could serve out the small quantity of water which was now wanted, so that his services were no longer required. Captain Staunton, of his own accord, wrote out a testimonial stating that John Prawle had discharged his duty satisfactorily. Prawle was much pleased upon receiving this document, stowed it away in his safest pocket, and then came and bade me good-bye, saying that he would return in a day or two, and tell me all the news. I knew that he had picked up some friends among the passengers in the intermediate cabin, with whom he went ashore, but I will say no more about them now, as I shall have to speak of them again presently.

Now you must not imagine that I was going ashore in a strange country a poor, friendless lad, with nothing but Mr. Hayward's ten sovereigns in my pocket, and a bill for twenty pounds on the Union Bank of Australia, which my father had sent me just before I sailed. Even with thirty pounds in my pocket, I should not have been badly off, compared with some of our passengers, who after paying

the steamboat fare up the river had not a sixpence left, but I possessed other advantages besides these, and you will presently be able to judge how wisely and prudently I behaved. One afternoon Captain Staunton was meditatively pacing the quarter-deck—he had been on shore all the morning—when seeing me in the act of locking the storeroom door, he called me to him :—

“Have you finished all your business, Scudamore?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; all except some accounts, and Mr. Hennessy hopes to get them completed to-night.”

“Then you’ll be ready to go ashore to-morrow?”

“If you please, sir.”

“Now I want to say a word to you, my lad. I’ve been to Melbourne half a dozen times before now, but I never saw it in such a state as it is at present. These gold diggings have turned everything topsy-turvy. It’s a queer place for a boy of your age to set foot in all by himself.”

“I have a friend, sir.”

“Who?”

“John Prawle,” said I, colouring.

The captain laughed. “What! that long-legged youngster that used to serve out the water? He seems a steady lad, but he is scarcely old enough to look after himself and you too. Are you going gold-digging?”

“We mean to try, sir.”

“Take my advice, and don’t try. You’ve been too softly brought up, both of you, for such work. It’s only fit for railway navvies and jack-tars. Now, I’ll tell you something. Mr. Hennessy is not a man of many words, and he says you have done your duty very well. Consequently, I mentioned you to our consignees, Messrs. Turnbull & Anderson, this morning. They want a smart lad who can

write and cipher. "Would you like to go into their office?"

I hung down my head, and did not speak for some seconds. Wherever I went I seemed to be pursued by pen, ink, and paper. At last I stammered out, "Thank you, Captain Staunton, very much, but I'd rather not be confined to a desk. I'd rather work in the open air."

"Just what I expected," he replied, good-humouredly. "Then I'll make you another offer. Would you like to take the round voyage with me, go up to Calcutta, and return to England? You can mess with the other apprentices, and learn all that they learn."

"I would sooner do that than sit in an office, sir; but—but——"

"But what?"

"Well, sir, I've promised Prawle——"

"What makes you so fond of Prawle?"

"I don't know, sir. I like him very much."

"And what have you promised him?"

"To stick by him as long as we're in the country."

"Preserve us!" cried the captain, laughing. "What a pair of babies you'll be among all these sharpers and villains! Well, I can't keep you on board against your will, or else I would. You must choose your own way. But in case you ever want a friend, I'll give you a letter to Mr. Walter Turnbull."

"Thank you, sir."

That evening Prawle returned on board, full of stories. "You can't think what a rum place Melbourne is, Stephen," he said. "It was built to hold five-and-twenty thousand people, and contains eighty thousand. Consequently, a bed is not to be had for love or money. Even the Governor, I am told, has his house full of lodgers, and the

Chief Secretary roosts out of window, at the end of a long pole. A cauliflower, as big as your fist, is worth three shillings, butcher's meat is twopence a pound, and if you stir out after dark with money in your pockets you are sure to get robbed. It's a beastly hole. Everybody says the diggings are better than Melbourne, so we must start as soon as we can, but just now the roads are up to the bullocks' necks in mud."

Prawle was rather prone to exaggeration, but I afterwards found that there was a good deal of truth in his description.

That evening Mr. Hennessy told me that he was going ashore the next day on business connected with the ship, and that Prawle and I might go with him if we pleased. I need not relate here how sorry I felt when the time came for bidding good-bye to our staunch old ship, which had carried me safely for sixteen thousand miles, to say nothing of separating from the friends I had made among the officers and crew. Directly after breakfast I got my luggage on deck, and Prawle and I held a solemn consultation over my boxes. "I say, Stephen," he said, "after inspecting the contents of my largest box, 'you've got a jolly lot of things; they'd be no end of use in a civilized country, but here I don't know what you'll do with them. You can't lug that great chest up to the diggings, and the warehouses are all stuffed chock-full to bursting with luggage and emigrants' goods."

"Ah! you're right there, mine yong friend," said a dark-complexioned hook-nosed man, who had been darting keen glances from a pair of hawk-like eyes at my luggage; "de stores are chock-full, and vot ish more, de storekeepers are a set of robbers. You put your goots in their varehouse, you pay five shillings a veek for de accommodation, you

come back in a month's time, and you find your box broke open, every ting gone dat ish vorth stealing. I give you my vord, they are daylight robbers, these storekeepers."

"What's to be done?" I whispered to Prawle dolefully.

"I should sell the big box, and all that's in it, if I were you," answered my comrade.

"You would sell it?" said Hawk-eye, "but who would puy it? Who would puy this?" he continued, laying his great yellow claw of a hand on an elegant sprigged waist-coat, which my dear mother had packed up as part of my Sunday attire. "Dese articles are not vorn in Melbourne."

"I think I had better send the box back to England," I observed, in despair.

"No, no, my tear yong gentleman. That vill never do. You must make your monish of it."

"But according to you, nobody will buy it of me."

"Not many would puy it. But there ish von man in Melbourne that puy such goots for the German market. He ish a ferry goot man is Mr. Wolf. Vy, dere he ish!" exclaimed Hawk-eye, in accents of the most utter astonishment.

"Wolf! Wolf! Who'd ever tink of seeing you here?"

"Good morning, Mr. Marks," said a quiet-looking elderly man, with a dirty face. "Vot ish it?"

Hereupon Mr. Marks explained that I wished to sell my box and its contents. Mr. Wolf seemed very unwilling to buy, declaring that his stores were full from garret to cellar, but, ultimately, at Mr. Marks's earnest entreaty, and, as a token of the high respect and tender affection which he entertained for that gentleman, he agreed to give me five-and-thirty shillings for my box and all the articles contained therein. The said articles had been selected and packed, with the utmost care, by my dear mother, and had cost at

least six pounds of my father's hard-earned money. Captain Staunton kindly undertook to forward the remainder of my luggage to the consignee's office, as he was sending certain surplus stores ashore. Then, the captain's gig was lowered, the three apprentices and myself manned the oars—for none of the crew could be trusted ashore—Mr. Hennessy took the tiller-ropes in his hand, and we waved our farewells to the *Ruth Hayward*. “

When I said that we could trust none of the crew ashore, I did not speak quite literally, for we had one of the sailors in the stern-sheets of the boat, a poor fellow who had been for weeks ill with the scurvy, who had been gradually growing worse, and who was now being taken, by the captain's orders, to the Melbourne Hospital. He was a pitiable object. His face was blotched with the horrible disease, and his legs were all black and swollen. He had not contracted the complaint on board the *Ruth Hayward*, for our provisions were of excellent quality, and our lime-juice was served out with the regularity of a man-of-war, but during a previous voyage, on board a whaler, where he had lived on salt provisions for twelve months at a stretch. And here I will mention the other piece of business which Mr. Hennessy had undertaken to execute for the captain.

Just before our vessel left Liverpool, a wealthy and highly-respected merchant, named Donnithorne, visited Captain Staunton, and told him that his brother, who was going out as a second-class passenger, was so addicted to drink that it was not safe to trust him with any large sum of money on board ship. He therefore handed the captain a bill for fifty pounds, requesting him to defray any necessary expenses which might be incurred, and hand his brother the balance on arrival in Melbourne. Mr. Edgar Donnithorne, the passenger, appeared to be an agreeable

gentleman-like man ; but he soon showed his evil propensities, got drunk every day, and, in a week or two, had spent all the spare cash which he had in his pocket. He then implored the captain to advance him more liquor on the strength of the £50 bill. Captain Staunton and Mr. Hennessy, having consulted together, agreed that it would be impossible to debar him altogether from drinking. They determined therefore to allow him wine and beer to the extent of ten shillings a week (not an immoderate allowance, for the wine cost half a crown, and the beer a shilling a bottle), and I don't think he ever was the worse for liquor again during the remainder of the voyage. On the first day of our arrival in Hobson's Bay, Donnithorne came to Mr. Hennessy in high spirits, said that he was going ashore, just to see something of Australia, in company with four or five other passengers, and that he would return the same night, as all his luggage was still on board. He asked for money, which Mr. Hennessy felt was a reasonable request, and accordingly, with the captain's sanction, he advanced Donnithorne thirty shillings. Late that night, all the passengers who had gone ashore, excepting Donnithorne, returned in a sailing-boat which they had hired. They said that Donnithorne had picked up some acquaintance at a tavern, and had declined to return with them to the ship. Several days passed away, and, as no Donnithorne appeared, Captain Staunton grew anxious, and determined to advertise for him in the *Argus* newspaper. Mr. Hennessy undertook to order the insertion of the advertisement while on shore, and this was the second piece of business which he had to execute.

I shall not say much about my first impressions of the colony. We landed at Liardet's Beach, where, at that time, there was only an hotel, and a wooden building or

two. It is now a bustling suburb, "connected with Melbourne by a railway, and re-christened Sandridge, an appropriate name, seeing that it is built on a *ridge of sand*. We engaged a scat for our sick man in a sort of omnibus which plied between the town and the beach for the moderate sum of half a crown—the distance was only three miles—and then proceeded on foot, sinking in many places over our ankles in sand, till we crossed the Prince's Bridge, and entered the famous city of Melbourne. Our eyes were at once struck by several peculiarities. Among the crowds which thronged the streets there were five-and-twenty men to one woman; the men were mostly dressed in bright-coloured flannel shirts, and wore hats made of felt, straw, and cabbage-tree; the houses were built very irregularly, a handsome three-storey edifice being situated often between two miserable wooden huts; lastly, every third or fourth shop was covered with placards, offering to buy gold at the highest possible price.

On our arrival at the hospital we delivered over the sick sailor to the care of the house-surgeon, who received him with much kindness and consideration. The surgeon then said, addressing himself to Mr. Hennessy:—

"I wish you would come with me into the accident-ward. I want to show you a case there. The patient appears to be a new comer in the colony; we can ascertain nothing about him, and as you have been purser on board a large passenger-ship, perhaps you can help us."

Prawle's great eyes glistened at the word "accident-ward." He was the kindest creature in the world, as I shall hereafter have occasion to show; but he had a keen appetite for horrors. So he said, "May we come too, sir?" "Certainly," replied the surgeon, "if you will tread softly, and talk gently."

The accident-ward was not nearly such a dreadful-looking place as I had imagined, and I could tell by the expression of Prawle's face that he was quite disappointed. Everything was clean, quiet, and airy. Little was to be seen of the patients, except their heads, though some, who were recovering, sat up, propped by pillows, reading books. There was one exception, however—the man whom the house-surgeon had invited us to see. His skull was fractured, and his face was completely laid open by a terrible transverse cut, extending from the forehead across the nose to the lower jaw. He was lying in a state of insensibility, breathing heavily; a most pitiable object to behold. We all gazed at him with horror-stricken eyes, and we all murmured at the same moment—

“Donnithorne!”

Yes, it was Donnithorne. He had been picked up in this dismal condition in one of the swamps which, at that time, existed between Williamstown and Melbourne. He could give no account of himself, but it was supposed that he had got drunk, and had then been followed by some of the miscreants with whom the colony was swarming, and assaulted in this dreadful manner. Mr. Hennessy left the balance of his money with the hospital authorities, never expecting again to see him alive. I was afterwards surprised to hear that he had completely recovered, that he had gone up the country as a shepherd, and had become a strict teetotaller. Perhaps that cracked skull preached a practical sermon on the dangers of drink which he was unable to resist.

On board ship Mr. Hennessy had been rather strict and stern, seldom talking of anything except our official duties, which had indeed occupied nearly all our time. Perhaps he was afraid that if he became too free and easy I should

take liberties with him, and neglect my work. Now that he was on shore, and that his duties as purser had ended, he became quite a different creature, and, though still rather sober and decorous, he made himself very pleasant. He invited Prawle and myself to dine with him at the Shakespeare Hotel in Market Square, and as we came in sight of the house, a humble one-storied building, he told us its history.

"This," he said, "is, I believe, the first house that was built in the colony. For some time after the pioneer settlers arrived here from Van Dieman's Land, in 1835, they lived in tents, which lay scattered about among the gum-trees. This house was the tavern, the town-hall, the court of justice, and the church of the infant settlement, and here Mr. John Fawkner, who is now a great man, and a member of the Legislative Council, used to read prayers on a Sunday."

Mr. Hennessy went on to tell us that on his first visit to Melbourne the stumps of the original forest-trees were still standing in the middle of the Collins Street roadway. At the time, of our visit Collins Street was nearly as bustling a thoroughfare as Oxford Street, London.

On entering the tavern we saw a practical example of the foolish and extravagant way in which the lucky diggers got rid of their earnings. The pewter top of the bar was completely covered with champagne bottles, and a respectable-looking young man, dressed in the usual miner's costume, was standing there inviting everybody to drink a glass of champagne with him. He was apparently quite sober, and as he politely stated that he should feel hurt if we declined to partake, we each drank his health. Each bottle of champagne cost the giver of the feast twelve shillings. I have since seen the same sort of thing done

over and over again, but this instance impressed me the more, because it happened directly after I landed, and also because of the decent behaviour of Mr. Gregory. I ought to have said that he solemnly announced his name to each person who entered.

"My name is Gregory, sir, and I shall be obliged by your drinking my health."

Whereupon Mr. Hennessy, bowing with as much gravity as if he had been seated at the Port-Admiral's table, replied, as he raised his glass, "Mr. Gregory, your very good health," and then passed into the dining-room.

After dinner was over we all gave loose to our tongues.

"You don't mean to say that you won't go up to the diggings, Mr. Hennessy?" said Prawle.

"Certainly not at present," he replied. "I must stay a few days in Melbourne, but as soon as possible I shall go down to Portland, where my brother's farm is situated. The busy time of year is now coming on, and they will need all the help they can get. In the long run, Mr. Prawle," he said, with a smile, "we farmers will get hold of the gold which you dig for; you can't eat gold, so you will be obliged to exchange it for my brother's corn, and cheese, and butter."

"Don't be disheartened, Stephen," said Prawle, "by what Mr. Hennessy says. Everybody does not want corn and cheese, but everybody wants gold. If we can only dig enough of the yellow metal, we shall want for nothing which gold can buy."

"I say, Prawle," I asked, presently, "where have you slept since you came ashore?"

"Well," he replied, "in a variety of places. One night, on the parlour-table of a tavern, where I should have been very comfortable if another gentleman had not persisted in

putting his feet in my face ; another night, under a boat on the beach. The next evening, being flush of money, I found my way to Clutterbuck's Genteel Boarding-house, a sort of Australian imitation of M'Gaffney's. I shall stay there to-night, and you had better come there too. Tomorrow I intend to enter on a new line of life. We are all going to live in a tent."

"A tent !" said I. "How jolly that will be. Can I come too ?"

"Of course you can. I told them you were coming."

"Shall you consider it an impertinent question, Mr. Prawle," said Mr. Hennessy, "if I venture to ask you how you came to be flush of money? I know the *Ruth Hayward* didn't pay you very liberally for your services."

"I will tell you with all possible pleasure," replied Prawle. "Being of a haughty and at the same time of a sanguine disposition, I refused to borrow more than a sovereign of my friend Stephen here, when I went ashore, although fully aware that he was rolling in riches. The steamboat fare and a little refreshment swallowed up a quarter of my resources. The remainder I parted with in the following manner :—While I was seated in a tavern, enjoying a crust of bread and cheese and a glass of English ale, for which the landlord had luckily demanded cash on delivery, a respectably-dressed elderly man came in, and looked very hard at me several times without speaking. I told him, rather impudently, that I hoped he would know me again. He replied, 'I thought I did know you, sir, but I suppose I am mistaken. I fancied you bore a resemblance to my old friend Captain Peter Prawle, of the *Bouncing Betsy*.' 'I am his son, sir !' I exclaimed with astonishment. We then had a great deal of talk together. He told me that he was a squatter on the river Murray, that he

should be going past the Bendigo diggings in a few days, and that, if we pleased to accompany him, he would lend me and my friend (meaning you, Stephen) horses to ride upon. He asked me if my father had supplied me with plenty of money. I replied that I had only fifteen shillings in the world, and that that was borrowed money. He expressed his astonishment at my poverty, and said, 'Come, Prawle, for your father's sake I will make you a present of a twenty-pound note.' I was quite overpowered, and hesitated to take it, although he forced it into my hand. 'Well,' said he, 'if you are too proud to accept my gift, let us make an exchange. Give me your fifteen shillings—I want to settle a small account at the bar.' I could not refuse such delicate generosity. He presently went out, saying that he would return in five minutes. He did not come back: I began to grow suspicious, and showed the note to the landlord. 'Is that a good note?' I asked. 'It *was* a good note, he replied, 'but the bank failed five years ago.' I was in a tremendous 'wax,' especially when I found that my squatter friend was well known under the name of Soft Sawder Simon, and that he practised these tricks on every new chum he could get hold of. I had no money to pay for supper or a bed, but the landlord very civilly let me sleep on the parlour-table. Next day I met some of our passengers, who treated me to a dinner. That night I slept under the boat, as I told you. The day after, I wandered down to the wharf, looking for a job. A gentleman landed from a boat with a large portmanteau. 'Will you carry this?' he said, addressing a great, hulking, dirty-looking fellow, who was lounging against a post. 'Carry it!' cried the man, in a tone of disgust; 'I'll buy you up, and your trunk too, if you like,'—and he pulled out a roll of notes. 'I'll carry it, sir, if you please,' said I,

touching my cap. 'That's a good lad. To the Prince of Wales's Hotel, please.' The gentleman gave me half a crown; and, as I got a dozen jobs or more of the same kind during the afternoon, I found myself worth twelve shillings at sunset."

So much for Prawle's first adventures ashore. In the evening he took myself and Mr. Hennessy to Mrs. Clutterbuck's Genteel Boarding-house. I could not see much gentility about it, for we slept half a dozen in a room, cleaned our own boots, and washed in a basin set out in the yard upon an old packing-case. Mrs. Clutterbuck was a bustling, sharp-tempered lady. Mr. Clutterbuck was a tall, thin, doleful man, who had been a schoolmaster in England, and who appeared to spend his days in the yard, splitting obstinate logs of fire-wood with a very blunt axe. Most of the inmates of the house were new comers like ourselves, but there was one man present at supper whom everybody seemed to regard with some curiosity. He was a strange-looking old man, with bright eyes and a long grey beard. Prawle afterwards told me that he was a medical man, that he was very proud of having been one of the first Victorian colonists, and that he was rather touched in the head.

I did not much fancy sleeping in a room with a number of strangers, but Mrs. Clutterbuck declared that she was unable to accommodate us otherwise. Nor was I much comforted when I saw the old colonist, who was reported to be mad, come stalking in. He undressed, however, quietly enough, and went to bed without saying a word to anyone. But soon after, when the candles were put out, and everything was quiet, this strange gentleman began to talk to himself in a loud voice, expressing his opinions concerning his neighbours with the utmost bluntness and sincerity. "What have all these donkeys," he exclaimed, come

to the country for? Do they expect to make their fortunes? They won't. The fool I sat next at tea-time means to make £10,000 in a twelvemonth. Ha! ha! ha! ha!" He went on in this fashion for half an hour, till somebody, who, I suppose, had heard his rhapsodies before, and had grown weary of them, cried out, "I say, doctor, hold your jaw, if you don't want a boot shied at your head." Hereupon the doctor relapsed into silence, and I went to sleep. But I afterwards awoke in a dreadful fright. The moonbeams were streaming in at the window, and in the moonbeams stood a white figure with a long beard. At first I took it for a ghost, when suddenly it began to speak, and I recognized the doctor's voice. "My dearest Louisa!" he exclaimed, stretching out his hands; "I shall come very soon, and join you. Don't look so reproachfully at me. You are my own dearest wife." Just as he said these words, a black object came whizzing through the air, and hit the doctor a smart blow on the back. "I told you I'd do it, doctor, and I have," said the same voice which had spoken before. "Why don't you stay in bed, you old fool?" I fully expected that the doctor would fly at his assailant, and that a desperate struggle would take place between them; but, instead of that, he crept back to bed quite quietly, merely saying, "You've bruised my back, sir, severely." "I meant to bruise it," retorted the other, savagely. "D'ye think I'm going to pay Mother Clutterbuck half a crown a night for a bed, and get no sleep? You ought to be in the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, that's where you ought to be." I did not sleep very comfortably after this altercation, and was very glad when it was time to get up.

•Next day Prawle and I parted from Mr. Hennessy, and made preparations for beginning our adventurous life in

earnest. We went to a ready-made store, and there bought blue serge shirts, corduroy trousers, cabbage-tree hats, and long boots. I contemplated my appearance with huge satisfaction in the storekeeper's looking-glass, and felt immediately like an experienced old miner. We also bought a frying-pan, two tin plates, two pannikins, two knives and forks, and two pair of blue blankets. I then chose out of my boxes a few coloured cotton shirts, some socks and handkerchiefs, as well as a few tools, a gimlet, a tomahawk, a small saw, a pocket compass, and various other necessary articles. Having taken everything out of my boxes that I was likely to want, I packed up the remainder, and, with Prawle's assistance, carried them to the warehouse of Messrs. Pickford & Co., and deposited them there. I had not forgotten the warnings of the German Jew on board the *Ruth Hayward*, but I felt that a firm bearing the honourable name of Pickford must be respectable. "Are you connected with Pickford, the great, London carriers?" said Prawle to the warehouseman. "Yes," he answered, "it's the same concern." Thereupon, being fully satisfied, I paid a month's storage rent in advance, rolled up my kit as neatly as I could, fastened it on my shoulders, and trudged away towards North Melbourne.

In those days there was very little cultivated land near the town. You went along Elizabeth Street, for example, a bustling thoroughfare, full of shops, but when you got to the end of the street you found yourself in the aboriginal bush, except that there were not many trees left, most of them having been cut down for firewood. This was the grand route to the diggings; but as there was no macadamized road and no fences, the track made by the bullock-drays and horse-waggon was nearly a mile wide, everybody

choosing his own path, in order to avoid the quagmires of mud. On a rising ground, where a few trees were still left standing, and within a mile of the city, I perceived three or four tents pitched. "That's the place we chose for our encampment," said Prawle, "and one of those tents belongs to our mates—they said they would pitch it this morning; but I can't tell which it is till I get close up."

Near the tents there was a small fire burning, and over the fire there stood a young man holding a frying-pan in one hand and a fork in the other.

"Don't you know who that is?" said Prawle.

"No, I don't," I replied.

"That's Wallington, one of the intermediate passengers. Don't you remember him? They used to call him 'Lively Jemmy,' because he was always up to some lark or other. And there's Harvey, his mate, standing at the door of the tent. Coo-o-o-o-ey!"

Mr. Prawle uttered this well-known Australian signal with wonderful emphasis and accuracy, considering that he was a mere infant, colonially speaking, not a week old. To listen to him, you would have thought that he had been bred at the Antipodes.

"Coo-o-o-o-ey!" replied Lively Jemmy, as he shaded his eyes with his hand, and then dexterously turned a mutton-chop in the frying-pan. "Hallo! Prawle, old boy, so it's you, is it? We'd given you up for lost. You're just in time for dinner."

Harvey, who was lounging at the door of the tent, joined in these hospitable remarks.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Prawle, with great solemnity, "allow me to introduce to you a friend of mine, formerly holding a high official position on board the *Ruth Hayward* as Deputy-Assistant-Storekeeper-General. He has now

abdicated those lofty functions, and desires to be admitted to our honourable fraternity as plain Stephen Scudamore."

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed Messrs. Harvey and Wallington: "Are you coming up to Bendigo with us?" asked the latter.

"If you'll allow me," I answered.

"Most decidedly. A friend of Prawle is a friend of all; eh, Harvey?"

"Fine him! fine him!" cried Harvey. "Jemmy has perpetrated a piece of poetry."

"Now then, gentlemen," said Jemmy, "dinner is served. The mahogany groans beneath the culinary delicacies piled upon it. In other words, I've turned this bucket upside down, and set the frying-pan on top of it."

"Take your seats," added Harvey. "Here's a packing-case for you and Scudamore, Prawle, I'm going to sit on this bundle of blankets. Jemmy won't want a seat; he's going to wait at table."

"Is he?" replied Jemmy. "I guess you're mistaken. Jemmy has done the cooking, and that's enough for him. In this free and enlightened country every man waits upon himself. I'm glad to see you've brought plates and pan-nikins, Scudamore, as we have none to spare. Here's the tea, for anybody who wants it, strong and hot; and I've treated the company to milk to-day, as we shan't get any on the diggings."

I enjoyed this dinner uncommonly. It was like a rough sort of pic-nic, and reminded me of the days when Lucy and I feasted on bread-and-cheese and apples in Halket Wood. I suppose my appetite must have been particularly keen, for, though Jemmy Wallington was but an indifferent cook, the mutton chops tasted most delicious. Then there was a charming sort of confusion about our mode of living.

The place where the tent was pitched was wild and uncultivated, and put me in mind, with the other tents that were dotted about, of an encampment of gipsies; yet we were close to a large bustling town, we could see the church-spires and the warehouses, the stream of traffic to and from the gold diggings passed within half a mile of us, and the butcher from whom Jemmy had bought the mutton-chops had offered to call every morning for orders.

After dinner, while Prawle was engaged in washing the plates, Harvey proceeded to deliver an oration, as Jemmy Wallington called it.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I wish to make a few remarks, principally for the benefit of our new mate, Mr. Scudamore. Until this morning it was arranged that we were to start for the diggings on foot, carrying our traps on our backs, under the leadership of Captain Spanswick. This morning I had an interview with the captain. He informed me that he purposes to-morrow morning to submit to our notice a complete change of plan.

"What is the new plan?" asked Prawle.

"He declined to make it known till to-morrow morning."

"I hope he won't keep us hanging on here much longer," observed Prawle. "I want to get to the diggings."

"A little delay won't hurt us," observed Harvey. "The roads have been in an awful state all the winter. Every fine day gives us a better chance of travelling comfortably."

"Who is Captain Spanswick?" I asked.

"A friend of Harvey's," answered Jemmy Wallington. "Tom will tell you all about him. Quite an aristocrat, isn't he, Tom?"

"He's a very nice fellow," observed Harvey. "Full of pluck and vigour. He's just the man to organize a good working-party."

"Why doesn't he live out here in the tent?" I asked.

"Bless you!" cried Jemmy, "the captain is too great a swell for such a humble edifice as this."

"Nonsense, that isn't the reason," said Harvey. "He'll rough it with anybody, if necessary; but business compels him to stay down in town. He knows a lot of squatters, members of Assembly, and so on; that's why he goes to the Prince of Wales's Hotel."

"Prince of Wales!" said Prawle. "Is he a smartly-dressed little man, with a red beard?"

"That sounds like him," answered Harvey.

"Then it was he who gave me half a crown for carrying his portmanteau. He seemed a jolly fellow."

"He is so, and no mistake," said Harvey.

Just before sunset Wallington called out, "Who's coming to help me fetch wood and water?"

I was longing to be of some use, so at once said with alacrity, "I will go with you."

"Come along, then. Catch hold of this bucket, and I'll take the other. And, I say, I see you've got a saw and a tomahawk. They're both useful tools. Bring them with you."

We went for nearly half a mile across a very desolate region. It was entirely uncultivated, and had formerly been thickly timbered, but now the axe had felled nearly all the trees, and there were only a scattered few here and there remaining. At length we reached a hollow place between two hills, where there was a pool of very well-tasted, though rather muddy, water. We filled our buckets, and then looked about for firewood.

"I don't see a stick of timber lying about," said Jemmy. "We must either hack away with the saw and tomahawk at these old stumps, or else we must cut down one of those

little trees yonder. Now, cutting down trees is risky work here. It's strictly prohibited within the city limits. If the police saw us, they would clap us in chokey. I don't blame them for trying to preserve any shady or ornamental trees. But of what use is that scraggy brute yonder, except for firewood? He has only one branch on his thin, twisty body, and his head is about as big as a hearth-broom."

"Let us cut him down," said I, drawing my tomahawk from my belt.

The tree in question was about twenty feet high, and as thick at the butt as a man's thigh. Our tools were small, and it was almost dusk by the time we had hacked it down, and cut off a good bundle of firewood from the upper end.

"Come along, Scudamore," said my companion, as he staggered away under the weight of his two buckets of water; "pick up your faggots, and look sharp, or it will be dark before we get back to the tent."

With these words he took his departure, and had proceeded a hundred yards before I had properly arranged my pack of firewood for carrying. I was just in the act of placing it on my shoulders, when something touched me from behind. I turned round with a great start, and was extremely surprised to find a woman standing before me. She seemed to have risen up out of the earth, for no human being had been previously visible. She was about thirty years of age, rather shabbily dressed compared to most of the Melbourne ladies, whose clothing was smart and new, and her face bore a very sorrowful expression.

"Can you tell me—?" she began, in a soft voice.

"Are you coming?" shouted Jemmy Wallington, without turning his head round, "I shan't wait any longer."

"All right," I answered, and then turned to listen to the woman.

"Can you tell me," she asked, as she looked round with rather a bewildered air, "what has become of my tree?"

I started guiltily at these words. Who could this woman be? I had heard in London of the Ranger of the Parks; perhaps this lady, in spite of her shabby dress, was the Ranger of the Victorian Woods and Forests.

"Your tree, ma'am?" I said, doubtfully.

"Yes, a tall thin tree, with one branch sticking out from it."

"We have cut it down."

The woman uttered a loud cry. "Oh! you cruel creatures," she said. "How could you do so? And yet how could I expect you to know any better? The last link is broken—the last link is broken. Perhaps it is better so. I shall never come here again." And without saying another word, she rushed away into the darkness, leaving me all alone. I essayed to "cooey" for Wallington—mine was but a feeble imitation of Prawle's vigorous utterance—but I received no reply; so was compelled to try and find my way back to the tent by myself. But this was not an easy matter. As is generally the case when one is with a person who knows the way, I had paid no attention to any landmarks, and I was quite at a loss to know in which direction the tent lay. I wished that crazy woman had been at the top of Mount Macedon before I saw her, for it was through staying to listen to her wild utterances that I had missed my companion. Now, there would have been some honour and glory in losing one's way, and then recovering it in the wild trackless bush of the interior of the colony, but here it seemed absurd to talk of being lost.

The twinkling lights of the city of Melbourne were right before me, and half an hour's brisk walking would take me among the streets and shops. That, however, would not help me to find our tent, so I determined to avoid entering the city, and wandered about the outskirts for two hours or more, till I felt quite exhausted with the weight of the load of firewood which I was carrying. I should have been delighted to throw it down, and escape from the burden of bearing it, but I felt that I was bound in honour to carry it until I discovered my mates. At last I saw a tent gleaming in the distance by the light of a small fire, round which three or four figures were standing. I ran hastily forward, shouting, "Prawle! Harvey! Wallington!" In reply to my summons, a great dog rushed out at me, barking with such excessive rage and fury, that he nearly choked himself. He would have seized me, but I held out my hat to him, and while he was snapping at that, I gave him a vigorous kick, which sent him yelping away.

"What d'ye mean by kicking my dog, yer young thief?" exclaimed a loud, bullying voice; "I'll shoot yer, if yer don't keep off."

A moment later I saw the flash and heard the report of a gunshot. I don't suppose the man meant to do more than frighten me, but, at the time, I could have declared that I heard a bullet whistle close by my head. I stooped down to avoid a second shot, and then ran away as fast as the darkness and the tired state of my legs would allow me.

Some time afterwards I drew near another group of tents. Being rendered wise by experience, I resolved to approach them with great caution. As I did so, I heard voices raised in loud altercation, intermingled with the growling of a dog. At first I thought I had got to the

tent where I had been treated so inhospitably, but I presently perceived that it was not the same place.

"What d'ye mean by tumbling over my tent-ropes for?" said a deep voice.

"I couldn't help it," was the reply. "Why did you set your dog at me?"

"To larn you better manners than to go disturbing a man arter he'd turned in."

"Your brute of a dog has bit my leg."

"So much the better. I'd punch your head for two pins."

"Would you?" And a tall gawky figure, which looked uncommonly like a figure that I knew, assumed a fighting attitude, and squared up to its antagonist.

"Come on, Harvey and Wallington, and see fair play," it said. "We're going to fight it out."

At these words I rushed forward, shouting, "Prawle, Prawle! Hurrah! I've found you at last!" A minute later I had reached the tent, had thrown down my bundle of wood, and lay on the ground panting with fatigue. My entrance had caused a slight interruption to the battle which was about to take place. The intending combatants were not very unequally matched, for Prawle, though only sixteen, was tall of his age, muscular and active, while his enemy was a short, punchy, broad-shouldered fellow, of at least five-and-forty years of age.

"I'm a Greenwich man," observed the punchy gentleman, as he flourished his fists, preparatory to action, "and I ain't afeerd of no one."

"A Greenwich man!" said Prawle; "why, I was born at Greenwich. I was born in the Trafalgar Road."

"You don't mean that," said his adversary, with an air of astonishment, as he lowered his fists. "D'ye know Poyntz, the tea-grocer?"

"Of course I do," said Prawle, readily. "He lives at the corner of Nelson Street. My mother has dealt there for years."

"D'ye know Ivins the oilman?"

"Know Evans!" replied Prawle, unconsciously correcting his enemy's pronunciation. "I know Evans as well as I know my own father. I wish I'd as many sovereigns as I've eaten Yarmouth bloaters out of Evans's shop."

"Ha! ha!" shouted the punchy man, apparently quite tickled with Prawle's recollections. "Then you and me's 'towneys,'* it seems arter all. Well, well, it warms a man's 'art to find a fellow-countryman in this here dissolute country. Shake hands," he continued, extending a formidable brown paw. "I bear no malice. No more don't Pug," he said, indicating the dog. "Shake hands, Pug, with the young feller from Greenwich. And now, gentlemen," continued the punchy man, turning towards Harvey and Wallington, "allow me to make a hobsevation. 'This young feller and me has had a difference. 'That difference is now made up. Let us drink success to our future careers, whatever those careers may be. In my tent, which but for Pug, would be quite solitary, my mate, wot come out from Greenwich with me, being prosterated with colonial fever in the 'orsepital—in my tent, gentlemen, there are two bottles of beer, the last of a batch brought aboard ship by me, and brewed on Blackheath Hill. Have the kindness, gentlemen, to enter, and partake."

We all closed with this hospitable offer, and at once entered and partook. Prawle speedily forgot all about the quarrel, and being of a jovial disposition, entertained the Greenwich man by singing a comic song, with which he was

delighted, inasmuch as it contained certain allusions to the steamboats belonging to the Watermen's Company. Harvey and Wallington were very merry, and I was growing extremely sleepy, being quite tired out by that long tramp, with a heavy bundle of firewood on my back, when, all of a sudden, we were startled by the sound of a horse's hoofs, coming close to the tent. Pug set up a deep growl, and the Greenwich man pulled open the door of the tent to see what was the matter.

Close by the remains of our fire, which still emitted sufficient light to render surrounding objects visible, there stood a tall, handsome horse, upon whose back was seated a tall, handsome, picturesquely-dressed man. He wore a bright scarlet over-shirt, white cord breeches, thigh-boots, a black slouched hat, and carried a brace of revolvers in his belt. In his right hand he held a black clay pipe, and, with a somewhat peremptory voice, he bade one of us hand up a firebrand to light his pipe with. Prawle immediately obeyed the request, and we all stood regarding the stranger with eyes of uneasiness and awe; for, as we afterwards confessed to one another, we had made up our minds that he was the captain of a band of bushrangers. The supposition was not so very unnatural, for the country swarmed with these gentry at that time, and they were fond of arraying themselves in this gay picturesque style.

The stranger took two or three deliberate puffs at his pipe, until he had got it well alight, and then said, "Who's the oldest chum in all this party?"

For a few moments we were silent; then Jemmy Wallington said, "We four belong to one ship, the *Ruth Hayward*. We've been five days in the country."

"I've been here three weeks," said the Greenwich man, with an air of conscious superiority.

"H'm," observed the stranger, "all tolerably green apparently. Now then, my lads, I'm tired, and thirsty, and lonely. I've ridden five-and-twenty miles without speaking to a soul. Can you ride, youngster?" he said suddenly, tapping my shoulder with his whip.

"Yes, sir."

"Then," said he, slowly dismounting with the air of a man who was thoroughly weary, "take my horse, and this one-pound note, ride him to the nearest tavern—it isn't a mile distant—and bring back all the grog you can get for the money. I'll help you to drink it."

My companions immediately assisted me to mount the horse—not that we wanted the spirits, for we would sooner have been a-bed and asleep, but because we were mortally afraid of this redoubtable stranger, who carried pistols in his belt.

In a short time I returned laden with bottles, and then the stranger came into our tent, and for two hours or more told all sorts of amusing anecdotes. Indeed, he made himself so agreeable that none of us felt any desire to go to bed. We gradually lost our awe of him, and at last Jimmy Wallington ventured to hint that we had taken him for a bush-ranger. The stranger laughed, and told us that we were not so far wrong. "For," said he, "although I am not a thief, I am a thief's advocate. I have had the honour of defending the majority of the scoundrels who have been hanged or sent to the hulks in this colony during the last ten years. In other words, I am, what is called in England, an Old Bailey barrister."

We afterwards found that this was quite true, and that he was a very clever lawyer, but eccentric, and fond of all kinds of strange frolics.

In the course of the evening I told the story of the me-

lancholy shabbily-dressed woman, who had addressed me by the waterhole. The lawyer listened with great attention ; and then said : " I can tell you who she is, and why she spoke to you. Her husband held an office of trust in this city. He fell into extravagant habits, committed some frauds, and when he was detected went and hanged himself on a tree not far from where we now sit. His wife was the first person who found him there ; she became partially deranged, and has, I have heard, been ever since in the habit of haunting the spot."

Soon after, the stranger rose, wished us all good night, hoped we might dig plenty of gold, then mounted his horse, which had been "hobbled" outside, and rode leisurely into town.





CHAPTER VII.

My first Night in a Tent—The Aristocratic Pie-merchant—Arrival of Captain Spanswick—Governor Latrobe and his Boot-black—Capt. S. makes a Speech—Fifteen Pounds a Head wanted—Prawle's Perplexity—I relieve him—Senor Gonzales Robinson—The Horse-Bazaar—We go into the Arena—Use of the Lasso—Prawle treats a Horse in "the London style"—Bravo! Long Legs—The Story of the Man from Gipps Land—Livery Stable v. Open Air—Naming the Horses—We move the Tent—Captain Spanswick's Instructions in Pistol Practice—We are divided into three Watches—The Dead of the Night—Gonzales' Tale of the Mexican War—The White Figure—The Shot from the Carbine—The Groan—The Discovery.

I DARE SAY there are some boys who will read this history of my adventures who have never slept out of a comfortable bed in their lives; so perhaps they may like to know how another boy felt when he slept for the first time with only a blanket between him and the bare ground, and nothing between his head and the stars but a thin sheet of calico. But we must remember that there are all sorts of tents; there are such tents, for instance, as great officers of state use when they are making a progress through some Indian province. These tents are splendidly elaborate constructions, so big that they contain

several rooms, and when folded up are carried on the backs of elephants, and so well furnished with chairs, and tables, and bedsteads, and hangings of scarlet cloth, and rich carpets, that you would easily suppose yourself to be in an elegant little house. Our tent was a much humbler and simpler affair. It was of an oblong shape, ten feet by eight; it was supported by two uprights and a ridge-pole, and, as I have already said, it was made of thin calico. Stout canvas would have been a much more useful material, as I shall hereafter have occasion to show : but it was made of calico because our party had intended to go up to the diggings on foot, and a heavy canvas tent would have been a tremendous burden to drag over rough or muddy roads. The interior furniture of the tent was extremely simple, consisting of a tin bucket or two by way of seats, while our carpet was the bare earth, on which at night we spread our blankets ; and crept in between the folds. Lest it should come on to rain, a trench several inches deep had been dug round the outside of the tent to carry off the water which in that case would pour down from the eaves. Luckily for our comfort my first night under canvas was beautifully fine ; but it grew very cold towards morning, and I was not sorry when Harvey jumped up, and asked me to help him in lighting the fire and getting the breakfast ready. It is sometimes said that a person is not properly rested unless he has taken all his clothes off. I think this is only a matter of habit, and that if you take off your boots, and loosen your neck-fastenings, so as to allow the blood to circulate freely between your head and your body, you may rise as thoroughly refreshed after a night's slumber in a tent or in the open air, as if you had lain on a patent spring mattress with an eider-down quilt to cover you. Of one thing I am quite sure. A person is much more inclined to leap up actively in the

morning from one of these rude and primitive couches, than from the soft and elaborate bed of civilized life. This is a luxurious age, and I sometimes think it would be a wholesome discipline for boys to harden themselves voluntarily while they live at home at ease, so as to be prepared for involuntary hardships afterwards. A friend of mine, though he had an excellent bed in the room, lay through the whole of a very severe winter on the bare boards, wrapped in an old military cloak, and he assured me that his health was greatly improved by this rough regimen.

I need not describe our breakfast, for it was exactly like the dinner of the day before, consisting of tea, bread, and mutton-chops. This, with beefsteaks sometimes for a change instead of mutton-chops, was the regular meal three times a day all over the colony at that time. Such food did not seem so distasteful to me at the period of our landing as it became afterwards, because the weather was cool and spring-like; but about Christmas-time, with a scorching hot sun overhead, and the air full of buzzing flies, we longed for strawberries and raspberries, and melons and grapes, and salads; in fact we longed for just the very things that nobody except a rich man could buy. Nothing was cheap at that time except butchers' meat. I remember a day or two after I landed that I bought a mutton-pie for sixpence of a street-hawker. Such a pie in England would be all crust; there would be the least bit of meat in the middle, and that bit of meat probably would belong to an animal which said "mew" while it was alive. Now the crust of my Australian pie was as thin as a wafer, because flour was scarce and dear, but it contained a good pound weight of solid meat. By the way, the man who hawked these pies about was quite a character. Though dressed in a common blue shirt, you could at once see that he had not been

brought up to pie-hawking.* His hands were well shaped and delicate, he wore a long dandified moustache, and spoke like a well-bred gentleman. Every pie that he sold was stamped with the arms and motto of his family in England, and a very ancient and haughty family they were. This was his whimsical way of revenging himself on them. He declared that they had shamefully defrauded him out of some property, and he determined to disgrace their name by hawking mutton-pies, stamped with their heraldic insignia, about the streets of the antipodes.

I must now return to my own adventures. Just as we had finished breakfast, we heard the sound of a horse's hoofs approaching, and Lively Jemmy, clapping his hand on Harvey's shoulder, cried out: "I say, Tom, here comes your friend the captain!"

In a few minutes Captain Spanswick made his appearance. A smart dapper red-whiskered young man of small stature, very neatly and actively built. He was riding a stout brown cob, and, except that he wore a Panama chip hat, was dressed as carefully as if he had just come from Rotten Row in Hyde Park. He wore a black coat of superfine cloth, a spotless white shirt, black necktie, and dark grey trousers, while his neatly-made boots could not have been more elaborately polished if he had kept a valet. My eyes were at once attracted by the captain's radiant boots, because Lively Jemmy had the evening before told me a story to the following effect. "The Governor's aides-de-camp, secretaries, clerks, servants, and labourers had run away to the diggings, leaving the Governor and his wife all by themselves. The Governor said to his wife, 'I have no objection, my dear, to your cooking or making the beds, while, as for myself, I will draw the water and chop up the firewood. But boots I dare not clean. What would the

Colonial Secretary in Downing Street say?' So he advertised in the *Argus* for a boot-cleaner. Although he offered liberal wages, he only got one answer, from a gentleman who agreed to undertake this arduous office on condition that the Governor handed over to him the whole of his salary, still continuing to burden himself with the government of the colony. The poor Governor," said Lively Jemmy, "being unable to accept these harsh conditions, may be seen every morning in his verandah at Toorak polishing away like a member of Lord Shaftesbury's brigade." Of course I afterwards found out that this story was all a hoax.

"So these are our two new recruits, eh?" said Captain Spanswick, addressing himself to Harvey. "Good morning, Mr. Prawle; good morning, Mr. Scudamore," and he shook hands very cordially with each of us in succession. "A couple of fine fellows," he said to Harvey, in a half-whisper, which we could not help hearing. "What! only sixteen! He's fit for a grenadier. And the other—What a nice-looking face he has—a gentleman's son evidently."

Old Prawle and I were as pleased as could be when we overheard these compliments. I blushed so much that I was quite ashamed, and was obliged to stoop down and pretend to be doing something with my bootlace. Prawle could not blush, because his face was naturally bright red; but his great eyes twinkled, as they always did under the influence of any emotion, either pleasurable or painful!

Having dismounted from his cob, and tied him to a neighbouring tree, Captain Spanswick lighted a cigar, and invited us to join him in what he called a "palaver," though most of the talking was done by himself. "Gentlemen," he said, "I may consider that our party is now complete. We are six in number; and you will find six a very convenient number, as we can work on the diggings in two

parties, of three members each." ("How does he make out six?" whispered Prawle to me; "I can only count five." But the captain immediately proceeded to answer Prawle's question, as if he had heard him ask it.) "You may wonder," he proceeded, "why I fix the number at six. The fact is that I propose, with your permission, gentlemen, to add another member—a highly valuable and efficient member—to our coterie. With your permission, gentlemen, I repeat; for, though I am your captain, I wish to consult you in all preliminary arrangements. When once we start on the road, discipline must be maintained. And here allow me to point out, gentlemen, your reasons for electing me as your captain." ("I never elected him at all," muttered Prawle, winking at me.) "Because you felt that I had experience. I alone of all this company had previously visited the diggings. You confided in me." ("Hear, hear," cried Tom Harvey.) "You knew that, with my practical experience, and, let me humbly add, my geological knowledge, if there is gold to be found anywhere, I am likely to put you in the way of getting it." (Great cheering.) "Gentlemen,—Do you continue to trust me?" (cries of "Yes, yes," principally from Tom Harvey.) "Then allow me to propose as a candidate for admission to our honourable fraternity my esteemed friend Señor Gonzales Robinson. 'A strange name,' you will say; but Señor Robinson is a still stranger man. He is a very remarkable man. He unites the impetuous fire of the Spaniard with the cooler fortitude of the Anglo-Saxon. You shall see him presently. And now I will tell you why I wish him to join us. We had originally proposed to go to the diggings on foot—I still adhere to that arrangement; but as the journey will occupy several days, I advise that we should do something which will not merely defray our

expenses on the road, but leave us a handsome profit upon our arrival at Bendigo, besides relieving us from the drudgery of carrying our tent and bedding on our shoulders. You are aware that provisions are dear in Melbourne, but they are far dearer on the diggings—two hundred per cent. dearer at least. The price of cartage to Bendigo is twenty shillings a ton for every mile, or £110 per ton for the whole journey. The reason of this exorbitant rate is that the roads are in such a dreadful state for wheeled vehicles. Now why should we not, as my friend Señor Robinson suggests, adopt the Mexican system? Why should we not buy a few steady horses,—horses are the cheapest things in the colony next to bullocks and sheep—and why should we not load those horses with a carefully-selected stock of provisions, and take them up the road with us? They will cost little or nothing for provender, and when we reach the diggings we shall be able to make a handsome profit on both animals and goods."

"I say, Stephen," whispered Prawle to me, "it sounds very jolly, doesn't it? But how much will it cost, I wonder? and who's going to find the money? Captain Spanswick," he said aloud, "How much will these packhorses cost?"

"I was just about to speak on that point. Fifteen pounds a head, I reckon, ought to cover every expense. Such horses as we want may be got for ten pounds apiece, and the goods ought not to cost above three pounds more; the remaining two pounds will cover any accidental expenses. Each beast and his load will fetch at least thirty pounds on the diggings, as prices are at present."

"I'm willing to go in for it," said Lively Jemmy.

"And I!" cried Harvey.

"And I!" said the writer of this story, quite excitedly.

"Gentlemen all, and Captain Spanswick in particular,"

said Prawle, with great solemnity, "I should be delighted to join you, but circumstances compel me to say 'no.' It may not be known to you, but it is 'unfortunately' well known to me, that a conspiracy exists among the Melbourne bankers against my signature; not one of them would honour my draft for fifteen pence, much less for fifteen pounds. I must therefore retire from your worthy company, unless," continued Prawle, glancing round, and rolling his eyes so comically that we all burst out laughing,— "unless there is any gentleman present who wants an active and enterprising young man to look after a horse and pack. I've no objection to the country, and I don't want a suit of livery."

"Prawle," I whispered, seizing his arm, "you must go with us. I can't part with you. I have thirty pounds—just enough to buy two horses and their loads. You shall pay me back when we get to the diggings."

On hearing these words, Prawle pressed my hand quite vehemently, whispering, "Stephen, you are a brick of bricks," and then once more rose to his feet. "Gentlemen," he began, "if I had tears, as Mr. Shakespeare says, I should prepare to shed them now. I am quite overpowered by the generous spirit displayed by this youthful capitalist—if I may so term him—who sits beside me. He has offered, gentlemen, to advance the funds necessary for the purchase of a horse and cargo." (Great cheering.) "Consequently, gentlemen, I willingly throw in my lot with the rest of you."

Soon afterwards, Captain Spanswick introduced us with great ceremony to our new comrade, Señor Gonzales Robinson. He was one of the funniest-looking figures I ever saw in my life; and if he had walked up Fleet Street dressed as I saw him dressed, he would certainly have had a grinning

mob at his heels. He was little more than five feet high, but enormously broad and muscular, with a flat nose, thick lips, and a nut-brown complexion. His dwarfish stature, his breadth, and his costume, combined to make up a most comical figure. He wore a bright green flannel shirt tucked into a pair of tight corded breeches, immense thigh-boots, and a great overshadowing Mexican hat with a bird's plume in it. But he did not look like a man at whom it would be safe to laugh. His face bore a stern, determined expression : there was the scar of a severe sword-cut on his cheek, and in his belt he carried a formidable pair of pistols. He spoke English fluently, but with a curious foreign accent ; and, as Prawle whispered to me, was probably half-nigger, half-Mexican, and half-Indian. In one hand he carried a heavy riding-whip, which was frayed and greasy with long service ; in the other he bore a coil of rope, the use of which I did not at that time understand.

Señor Gonzales Robinson was a man of few words, but of prompt action. He listened somewhat impatiently to Captain Spanswick's explanations, and then said, "Is all settled ?"

"All is settled," answered the captain.

"You would like to go up with packhorses ?" continued the Mexican.

"Yes !" we cried.

"Then let us lose no time. To-day it is fine ; to-morrow it may rain. Besides, to-day there is a sale at the Horse-Bazaar. We will divide into two parties : two shall go with you, captain, and buy the provisions ; two shall go with me and buy the horses. Which of you understands horses ?"

Tom Harvey and Jemmy Wallington were both silent. The former had been clerk to a Manchester cotton-broker ;

the latter had been apprenticed at Huddersfield. Both were smart, active fellows, but thoroughly town-bred.

"I have been accustomed, sir, to ride a pony," I said, modestly.

"Good. You come with me. And the tall young man?" he added, indicating Prawle.

The tall young man boldly replied that he had always had a taste for horseflesh. "I don't actually know much about horses," he said, "having chiefly witnessed their evolutions from the box of an omnibus, but I am ready to obey your orders, Señor Robinson. I'm always willing to learn a new trade."

"Good. You come with me too."

Accordingly, Prawle and I accompanied Señor Robinson to the Horse-Bazaar. The name sounded much grander than the reality, for the bazaar was nothing more than a large space in the open air, surrounded with a fence of posts and rails. In one corner there appeared a sort of hustings, on which stood the auctioneer, a loud-voiced, red-faced gentleman in a sporting suit and a broad-brimmed straw hat, with a little hammer in his hand, a cigar in his mouth, and a clerk at his side. The space within the railings was filled with a number of horses, mostly, as we afterwards learnt to our cost, unbroken colts from New South Wales, which had just been driven in a "mob" overlaid. They had never had a saddle on their backs in their lives, and were, to all intents and purposes, as wild as the horses on the South American pampas. Two or three rough-looking fellows, with sun-tanned faces and great beards, who had their shirt sleeves rolled up to their elbows, and, in their hands, formidable stock-whips, the crack of which sounded like the report of a pistol-shot, lounged unconcernedly among the troop of horses, whose staring eyes,

laid-back ears, and shrinking forms, showed that they were entirely unaccustomed to be gazed at by an assemblage of two-legged creatures in this fashion. Outside the rails there was a heterogeneous gathering of men of all sorts and classes. Dandified gentlemen in well-cut tweed suits, who wore folds of blue or green muslin round their hats; store-keepers, draymen, car-proprietors, bullock-drivers; besides a large collection of loafers, who merely came to the sale to pass away an idle hour, staring at the horses, and remarking on the prices they fetched. The sale had already begun when we arrived on the ground. Señor Gonzales Robinson was a good deal stared at, even in that motley assemblage. But he seemed to be instinctively recognized as a man who understood horses, and came to the bazaar for business, and when we had contrived, by dint of pushing and squeezing, to make our way to the front, the auctioneer greeted the señor with a friendly nod. Each time that the auctioneer's clerk called out a lot, one of the shirt-sleeved men in the arena cracked his stock-whip, causing all the horses to rush to and fro like a flock of frightened sheep, and then the "overlanders," as I afterwards learnt these men were called, would walk calmly into the thick of the frightened throng, regardless of plunges or kicks, seize the horse by the mane to which the lot referred, and hold him firmly until the auctioneer's hammer had fallen. The sale lasted more than an hour, during which time Señor Robinson's experienced eye picked out the likeliest animals for his purpose, and he purchased five at about £11 a head. Prawle ventured to ask him why he didn't buy six horses, as that would only be one apiece. The señor replied that Captain Spanswick was already provided with a horse, and that he would not accompany our goods train, but would ride on ahead, and

arrive at Bendigo before us, so that when we got there he would be able to give us the latest news concerning prices and the prospects of gold-digging. At length the sale came to an end, and I innocently thought that we had nothing more to do, but that the "overlanders" would secure for us the horses we had bought. But I presently learnt from Señor Robinson that they would undertake nothing of the kind. Their connection with each horse terminated the moment it was sold, and buyers must go in and catch their horses for themselves, unless they chose to pay handsomely for the job. Accordingly, as soon as the sale was over, Señor Robinson, armed with his coil of rope and his heavy whip, entered the arena, followed by me and Prawle. I confess that I felt no small degree of trepidation, and I could see by the expression of my comrade's red face that he too was not very comfortable. The horses had all collected together in a bunch at one end of the inclosed area, and seemed wilder than ever. I wondered how the señor could tell which horses he had bought among such a swaying, plunging crowd; but in this respect he possessed an unerring eye, which never made a mistake. He began operations by approaching the herd, and sounding a tremendous crack on his formidable whip. This caused the terrified animals to break asunder and separate. The experienced eye of the Mexican at once singled out one of his own purchases, he ran nimbly backwards for a short distance, then, raising his coil of rope, he discharged it with all his force at the horse's head. At one end of the coil was a slip-knot, and this slip-knot fell over the animal's neck, effectually preventing any further progress. Prawle and I immediately discovered that which we had failed to perceive before. The coil of rope was nothing more nor less than a lasso, and most skilfully was it used by Gonzales Robin-

son. For a few moments the poor animal struggled desperately, then his eyes began to start out of his head, then his knees trembled, and he seemed on the point of sinking to the earth. At this critical moment, when suffocation would shortly have ensued, the lasso-thrower cautiously slackened the tension of the slip-knot, and, aided by Prawle and myself, slipped a halter over the animal's head. As soon, however, as the wild, frightened creature felt the deadly pressure of the cord removed, all his strength seemed to come back; he began to rear and plunge and kick with the utmost fury, and it required all the united strength of Prawle and myself to drag him up to the rails, where we fastened him securely, and then went off in search of a fresh victim. If a horse resisted very savagely, the señor, not content with the discipline of the lasso, lashed him mercilessly with his heavy whip. One of the animals, in order, I suppose, to escape the pressure of the lasso, threw himself down the moment after the cord had fallen on his neck, and lay on his side as if dead. "I am afraid he is dead?" said I to the señor.

He smiled. "Dead? No. He is too much alive. Creep quietly up to him, and halter him."

We crept quietly up, and slipped the halter over his head. Now, as this was the fourth horse in whose capture we had assisted, Prawle and I began to feel like old experienced horse-tamers, and when Prawle said, gravely, "I shall sit on his head; a London cabman always sits on his horse's head under similar circumstances," I felt that I was listening to words of ripe wisdom. But, unfortunately, the señor, not noticing what Prawle was doing, and only anxious to get his obstinate quadruped on his legs, suddenly delivered a stinging crack with his whip on the creature's hind quarters. Up leapt the astonished New South

Waleser, and away flew Prawle, head over heels, making a complete summerset in the air. He was not a bit hurt, for the area was ankle-deep in mire and manure ; but he was bespattered with filth from head to foot, and was received with shouts of laughter by the circle of spectators, who were watching Señor Robinson's performances with as much curiosity as if they had been looking on at a bull-fight. Prawle was very good-tempered, he was not at all annoyed, but made a low bow to the company, at which there were fresh roars of laughter, and when he explained that he was trying to do things in the London style, they cried, "Bravo, Long-legs !"

About this time, just as Señor Gonzales Robinson, and Prawle, and I had done all the hard work, and were standing resting ourselves against the posts to which we had tied our restive property, the remainder of our company made their appearance. Captain Spanswick glanced at the horses with the air of a connoisseur, ran his hand down their legs to make sure there were no spavined bones, and examined their great broad hoofs, which had never yet been contracted by the artificial confinement of a blacksmith's shoe. Having gone through this ceremony, he said that he was quite convinced of their soundness.

"But they seem a little wild for our work, eh, señor?" said the captain.

"Wild? Yes, they are wild, as any Mexican mustang. But all horses were wild once. They must be tamed."

The little man spoke these last words in such a tone of suppressed vehemence, and with such a ferocious roll of the whites of his eyes, that none of us would have cared to laugh at him, though we all thought him the most comical creature to look at we had ever come across.

The next point to be considered was where the horses

should be placed that night, as the provisions which we had purchased, the bags of sugar, the hams, the cheeses, the boxes of sardines, the cases of raspberry-syrup, and all the other good things with which we proposed to tickle the palates of the Bendigonians, would not be ready for our animals' backs until the next day. Señor Robinson, experienced among horses, but inexperienced in the villanies of Victorian colonists, advised that we should buy a sack of oats and some hay, take the horses out to our tent, and hobble them there for the night.

"Better put them in a livery-stable," said the captain.

"How much will that cost?" asked Lively Jemmy.

"Well, the charges just now are rather exorbitant. Fifteen shillings a head for the night."

We all exclaimed at this apparently monstrous charge.

"Fifteen shillings!" said Señor Robinson. "Then in a week your horses will cost as much for keep as they are worth."

"I'm quite aware of that," answered the captain, "the charge is most exorbitant, but it is equally high at every respectable livery-stable in town. By a respectable stable I mean one where you will find in the morning the horse you placed there overnight. Allow me to relate to you a little anecdote. The other day a friend of mine, a squatter, came down to town from Gipps Land. He had been up in the bush for two years, and was quite unused to Melbourne ways and Melbourne prices as they are at the present time. He grudged paying fifteen shillings for his horse's board and lodging, so at last put him up at a shabby little place in Prahran—on the Surrey side of the water, as you would call it, Mr. Prawle—where they agreed to take the horse in for seven-and-sixpence. The landlord said he would take all possible care of him, but declined to accept

any responsibility. The horse was a valuable young bright bay, bred on my friend's station. During the night, my friend, who slept at the tavern in order to be near his horse, was awoke by a loud knocking at his bedroom door. 'If you please, sir,' said a female voice, 'they say the stable's on fire.' Up jumped the Gippslander, hurried on his coat and trousers, and ran down to the yard. Sure enough there was something going on. Men were walking about, the stable-door was open, and a cloud of smoke was issuing forth. 'What's the matter?' 'Heap of straw in an empty stall took fire,' was the reply—'lucifer-match dropped by somebody—stable full of smoke—cried fire!—let the horses go—there they are, out in the yard—all safe and sound.' The Gippslander at once went in search of his bright bay, groping about in the comparative darkness of a starlight night, found him standing in a corner, looking contemplatively over a gate; led him back to the stable, which was by this time clear of smoke, and then lay down to finish his night's rest at the bottom of the stall, as an Asiatic groom does, being determined not to lose sight of his favourite again. In the morning he awoke, looked about him, and began to rub his eyes. The horse in the stall was a bright bay certainly, but he was not his bay. He was a handsome horse to look at, but closer inspection showed that he was utterly unsound in his forelegs, and that, in short, he was only fit for the knacker's yard. My friend said nothing to the landlord at the time, but went to the police. He got very little satisfaction out of them, for just at the present time the thieves and scoundrels have the whip-hand of the police altogether. The superintendent remarked that the job had been very neatly done, that it was more like an old-country trick than a colonial robbery. 'What is the name of the tavern?' he asked. 'The New

Rīng o' Bells, by Alexander Birnie.' 'Ah! then I'm not surprised; Mr. Birnie, otherwise Duncan Macduff, was a famous horse-coper in Glasgow years ago. But he is anxious to keep a respectable character now, so, if I were you, I should offer him an ounce of gold, and he'll get you your horse back again.'

"My friend went to the landlord, took him aside, and told him plainly that his horse had been stolen during the night, and a worthless brute substituted in its place.

" 'Yer hor-rse stolen! Eh! that's a most extra-ordinary thing!'

" 'Such extraordinary things have no doubt happened before in your experience, Mr. Duncan Macduff, late of Glasgow,' said the squatter drily.

" 'Nae doot, nae doot,' said the landlord coolly; 'but what can I do in the matter?'

" 'You can get my horse back again.'

" 'I?' cried Mr. Birnie in astonishment.

" 'Yes, you scoundrel,' cried my friend, losing all patience, and seizing the fellow by the collar. He then took a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at Mr. Birnie's head. 'Now, I'll tell you what it is,' he said, 'there's no law, no order, no police in this accursed town. I'm going to be my own lawgiver. Now, Mr. Birnie, if in a week from this time I don't get my horse back, or his value, that is, forty pounds, I'll put this bullet through your head. If you get my horse back, safe and sound, you shall have an ounce of gold for your trouble.'

" 'Twa can play at the shooting game,' quoth Mr. Birnie very calmly; 'however, I'll do what I can. Ye can let my collar go, man.'

" A few hours after, my friend recovered his horse. 'In

the confusion of the fire,' said the person who brought it back, 'it had been taken away by mistake.'

"Now," proceeded Captain Spanswick, "I know the colony pretty well; you, señor, with all respect to you, do not know it. If we take these horses out to our tent, we go just to the most dangerous place for horse-thieves, namely, to the outskirts of the town; we shall have to keep watch all night, and we can't prevent the horses from straying."

"Hobbled horses won't stray far," answered the Mexican, "if you give them a feed of oats."

"Why not strike the tent," said Lively Jemmy, "and move a mile or two further out of town?"

"The horse-thieves abound for a circuit of at least ten miles," replied Captain Spanswick. "After that you may reckon yourselves pretty safe till you get near the diggings. And, remember, you will have to return into town to-morrow to load up the stores. But, gentlemen, if you're at all dissatisfied——" he said, hesitatingly, as he surveyed the company—

"Well, Captain Spanswick," said Lively Jemmy, "we're most of us poor men. Fifteen shillings is a great deal to me, though it may seem very little to you. I'm putting all my fortune into this speculation. You may be sure that I don't want to lose my horse, but I do want to save expense."

"Hear, hear," said Prawle.

"Put it to the vote," exclaimed Harvey.

"If the votes are evenly balanced, you allow me a casting vote?" said the captain.

"Certainly, certainly."

"Very well, gentlemen. The question before us, put briefly, is: Livery-stable *versus* Open Air. Those

who are in favour of Livery-stable will please say 'Ay!'

Nobody responded "Ay" except the captain himself, and his faithful ally, Tom Harvey.

"Those who are in favour of the Open Air will please say 'No.'"

Señor Gonzales Robinson, Prawle, Lively Jemmy, and myself voted with the "Noes," who were thus victorious.

"Gentlemen," said Captain Spanswick, without the least sign of ill-humour, "I cheerfully accept your decision. I will come and take my share in watching with you; and as none of you, excepting Señor Robinson, are provided with fire-arms, I will bring with me a carbine and a couple of Colt's revolvers. But you won't expect me to risk my cob. I shall leave him in town at my own expense."

"Shall we move the tent?" asked Jemmy Wallington.

"As you have decided to camp out for the night with the horses, I think you had better do so," answered the captain.

"What say you, señor?"

"The further from the town, and from other tents, the better," replied the señor, looking, as he leaned against a post with his arms folded, like a compressed Hercules.

"Very well," said the captain; "then we may consider that question decided. The next point that arises is this:—how are we to decide the ownership of these horses among these five gentlemen?"

"Hadn't we better toss up?" said Lively Jemmy.

"Or ride a race, and see who wins?" said Prawle, winking at me.

"No, gentlemen, no," said the Mexican, gravely. "I advise no ownership till we reach the diggings, but let every one be responsible for the horse under his charge. I must

find out which are the most vicious horses, and give the most vicious to the best men."

"Rather jolly, at that rate, to be a best man," observed Lively Jemmy.

"Young man," said the Mexican, "do you not understand? A fool can manage a quiet horse; it needs a wise man to manage a skittish horse. I see trouble," he said, darting a quick glance at the horses, "in the eyes of these fellows."

"In everything that refers to horses, you may make pretty sure that the señor is right," said Captain Spanswick. "You have been a rider from a pretty early age, eh, señor?"

"Since so high," answered the Mexican, gravely, as he measured off about sixteen inches on the handle of his whip.

Prawle laughed, and then hid his great red face behind my shoulder.

Soon afterwards our cavalcade started, each member of the party, Captain Spanswick excepted, leading a horse. They gave us scarcely any trouble, except that they were eager to nibble any tempting specimens of grass which grew under their feet; but the señor warned us not to make sure that their conduct would always be as good as it was at present.

"Have you never seen a cruel child, gentlemen?" he said, in his quaint, foreign English. "He will pull off the wings of a fly, and then say, 'See, I have tamed that fly!' These animals are weary with heat, with fasting, with the punishment of the lasso. Wait till they have been fed and rested; then their wings, like Samson's hair, will grow again, and some of them will give you trouble. I can judge their disposition pretty well already. That black

horse which Mr. Harvey is leading is the quietest of all. Who will have the quietest horse?"

Pride prevented everybody from returning an answer.

"Understand me, gentlemen," he said, smiling for the first time through his sternness; "the quietest horse will not be so very quiet this time to-morrow. They are none of them accustomed to carry loads. Mr. Harvey, you had better keep the horse you have got."

"I'm agreeable," said Harvey.

"What shall you call him, Tom, eh?" asked Jemmy.

"I don't know," said Harvey.

"What do you say to 'Coalscuttle?'"

"Yes, Coalscuttle will do. Gee up, Coalscuttle!"

"Mr. Wallington," continued Señor Gonzales, "had better change with me, and take this brown mare."

"All right," said Jemmy.

"Call her Topsy," Jemmy, cried Prawle.

"Why Topsy?"

"Because she sent me flying topsy-turvy into the mud," answered Prawle.

We all laughed at Prawle's humble wit, and then the Mexican went on to say, "You, Mr. Prawle, and you, Mr. Scudamore, had better each keep what you have got."

"I shall call my white mare Lucy," said I, thinking of my sister on the other side of the world.

"Lucy!" cried Prawle; "how sentimental we're getting! And what am I to christen the yellow quadruped under my charge?"

"Won't Gamboge do for him?" said Captain Spanswick, laughing.

"Thank you, captain. Yes, Gamboge will do first-rate. Now we only want a name for the señor's chestnut."

"Names are of little consequence," said the señor

"still, if it pleases you, young gentlemen, he shall have a name. Let us call him by the name of the lake on the borders of which I was born--Titicaca."

"Good. Titicaca, my respected friend, allow me to salute you," said Prawle, stroking the animal's nose. The chestnut laid back his ears, and showed his teeth viciously.

"Have a care," said Señor Gonzales. "He can bite, and will bite, if he gets a chance. But if you bite, Señor Titicaca, I can bite back again, and perhaps my bite will be harder than yours."

The arrival of such a caravan caused quite an excitement among the inhabitants of the little cluster of tents. They came out, lounged about, looked at the horses' legs, and questioned us on the prospects of our expedition. Pug, the Greenwich man's dog, was a perfect nuisance. He barked till he was nearly out of breath; but at last, venturing too near Miss Lucy's heels, he received such a kick from my dear sister's namesake, that he ran away yelping on three legs, and molested us no more. It did not take long to strike and pack up the tent and our other movables. The pack was laid on Coalscuttle's back, as an experiment. He winced, trembled, and seemed greatly surprised at the unwonted pressure; but Señor Gonzales took him apart from the others, fondled his ears, addressed him in some musical foreign tongue, Mexican I suppose, whispered mysterious words in his ear, and, by degrees, reconciled him to the burden. Every moment the señor rose higher in our opinion. He appeared to possess the true genius of a horse-tamer.

We now travelled for two miles in a north-westerly direction, and at length camped in as secluded a spot as we could find, though all around us the ground was scarred with the tracks of bullock-drays. The tent was soon pitched;

there was a waterhole close at hand—for, in the spring-time of the year, water, even in arid Australia, is pretty plentiful everywhere,—and there was a prostrate log which provided us with a fire. Harvey and Wallington attended to the cooking department, Captain Spanswick and Prawle pitched the tent, Señor Gonzales and I put the hobbles on the horses, and gave them their provender. By the time we had accomplished all this work, the sun had set, darkness was coming on, and everybody was eager for tea and a jolly big beefsteak, which we had bought as we came out of town.

Before darkness came on entirely, we were divided, under Captain Spanswick's directions, into three watches. The first consisted of the captain and Harvey; the second of Prawle and Jemmy Wallington; the third of Señor Gonzales Robinson and myself. Each watch was to remain on duty for two hours, and to occupy itself in patrolling round and round the camp, challenging all visitors. The captain explained to us that we must be very cautious in the use of our fire-arms. "You must please to remember, gentlemen," he said, "that you are not in a barbarous territory, but in a British colony, under British laws. There are a great many scoundrels about just now, and the country is in a disturbed state, but that will not justify us in firing upon anybody unless our lives are in actual danger."

"Supposing," said Prawle, "a fellow comes and tries to take away a horse under my very nose, what am I to do?"

"You must seize and secure him."

"Suppose he is stronger than we are?"

"You must call up the rest of the party."

"If I may not fire, what is the use of this pistol?"

"To frighten him. Fire if you please, but take care to fire over his head."

"I shall not shoot," said the Mexican, in his deep voice, "unless I am obliged. But if I shoot at all, I aim straight. I aim, gentlemen, at my enemy's heart."

The two earlier watches had little solitude to complain of. Wayfarers were constantly passing near the tent, and, seeing our fire, drew near, either to get a light for their pipes, or to beg a drink of tea, or to enjoy a chat and the grateful warmth of the burning log. Captain Spanswick warned us against being too free in entering into conversation. "Be civil to everybody, but encourage nobody," he said.

I must confess that nervousness prevented me from sleeping comfortably. I was perpetually starting up, fancying that there were threatening voices round the tent, and expecting every moment to hear the report of a pistol-shot. I envied the weather-beaten Mexican, who lay stretched with his head upon the coil of his lasso, sleeping as placidly as an infant. But I observed that, probably from long habit of living among a lawless community, his right hand remained close to his pistol-belt, and I also noticed that when the second watch was over, and Prawle called him by name, he did not rise slowly, yawning, stretching, gaping, and blinking, as citizen-sleepers are wont to do, but started at once to his feet, standing as erect as a soldier, with all his wits about him.

"Now, young man," he said, addressing me as he handed me the carbine, and examined the caps on his revolver, "ours is the most important watch of all. 'Tis now the dead of the night. Let us keep our eyes open and our mouths shut while on duty."

In obedience to these commands I paced round and round the circuit which Captain Spanswick had marked out, and which contained—barring the provisions we had left

behind in Melbourne,—all that was valuable to us on Australian soil ; namely, our tent, our steeds, and our sleeping comrades. At intervals of about five minutes I met Señor Gonzales Robinson looking intensely stiff and military, with his punchy figure drawn up to its full height of five feet two inches. On these occasions, when I would have been glad if he had said something, he merely uttered a sort of inarticulate grunt of satisfaction, as much as to say, “ Everything is safe at present.” The night was very dark, for the sky was overcast by a thick canopy of cloud, and the flickering light from our fire, while it illuminated the tent and the horses—three out of the five of which had lain down to sleep—plunged all objects beyond our circle in a profound obscurity. At first I felt, like Señor Gonzales, extremely military, made myself as tall as possible, and tried to fancy I was a grenadier keeping watch and ward before the gates of her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle ; but I could not keep up the illusion for long, and when about three-fourths of the watch had been completed, I began to grow so tired and sleepy with this perpetual round, round, round, like a horse working a brickmaker’s pug-mill, that I nearly dozed off as I paced mechanically along. At last I came to a dead halt, and was on the point of dropping asleep on my legs, when I was suddenly startled into wakefulness by meeting my comrade. To my astonishment he clutched me by the arm, and without saying a word, drew me towards the fire. I was rather alarmed, for I thought he had detected my sleepiness, and was about to administer some dreadful punishment in accordance with the regulations of his native country ; but on looking at his face, I perceived that its ordinary tint of nut-brown had faded into an ashy paleness, and that the expression of his countenance betokened alarm rather than anger ; still he clutched my arm

convulsively, and then spoke, in a hollow, tremulous voice, the following words:—

“ Young man, I do not fear a living foe. If all the horse-stealers in Victoria came before me armed to the teeth, I would face them. I can die but once. But I do fear the spirits of the dead. Listen to me. Years ago, I fought for my native land,—for Mexico, against the Americans, who came to ravage and pillage our country. We had lost several battles, and many men. My blood boiled, and I swore an oath that I would give no quarter to the next American I met in fair fight. Again a battle took place, and I found myself face to face with a young American officer. He strove to cut me down, and then aiming his revolver at me, wounded me in the thigh. I rushed upon him like a jaguar, seized his sword-arm as if in a vice, and wrested his revolver from him. He was entirely in my power, he begged and entreated for mercy. I would have granted it, in spite of the stinging pain of my wound, for he was a fair-faced beardless boy, but I remembered my oath; I pressed the muzzle of the revolver to his forehead, and in another moment all his beauty was disfigured for ever. Since then, at times, when troubled and anxious, his spirit has haunted me. *It is here to-night.* If you do not believe me, I will show it you.”

Again he seized my arm, and led me away from the fire out into the darkness. He pointed with a trembling finger, whispering the while with a hoarse voice in my ear, till I was nearly as frightened as he was. A white figure was certainly perceptible at about a hundred yards' distance, and after watching it attentively I saw it move. Now my fears were just the opposite to those of our worthy Mexican friend. I had a wholesome awe of Victorian desperadoes, but I had no belief in ghosts, and when I saw the figure

move, I felt sure that it was some living creature. A bright idea struck me. "Perhaps," said I, "it is our white mare, Lucy."

"Yonder lies Lucy, asleep," answered Señor Gonzales. "No, no, it is *his* face; I can see the beseeching look, and the blood streaming down."

Again the figure moved. I could resist no longer, but raising the carbine to my shoulder, and remembering Captain Spanswick's injunction not to aim at the object, fired in the air. I was at that time very little accustomed to fire-arms, and the carbine, though a small piece, was a dreadful kicker. The effect of the recoil sent me flying backwards, and I had a pain in my shoulder all the following day. The noise of the report prevented me from hearing any other noise, but Señor Gonzales declared that the figure disappeared with a deep groan. One thing was certain, it had disappeared. But the noise of the carbine-shot aroused our comrades from their slumbers, and one after another came out of the tent in a state of great excitement to know what was the matter.

"Do not say it was a ghost," whispered Señor Gonzales to me. I think he was beginning to grow ashamed of his superstitions.

"I don't know what made you shoot, Scudamore," said Captain Spanswick, as he perceived the smoke curling from the muzzle of the carbine, "but I have the satisfaction of knowing that you can't have killed anybody, because I took care to put nothing but powder in your weapon. But what's the matter,—everything seems quiet enough?"

Before I could afford any explanation, Lively Jemmy exclaimed: "I say, look out: there's a fellow over there in a white jacket."

"Great Heaven," cried Señor Gonzales, "the spirit of

the American has returned again !". And he fell on his knees in the attitude of prayer.

Prawle was the laziest of the sleepers, and came lounging out of the tent last of all.

"I say, Prawle, you have cat's eyes, you can see in the dark: what is that over yonder?"

Prawle gazed steadily for a minute without speaking, then went down on his hands and knees, and crawled swiftly towards the mysterious object. We felt proud of his bravery when he shouted, "I've got him; come and help me to hold him!"

We all rushed forward like one man, eager for the fray. The enemy uttered the most singular cries, exciting our curiosity to the utmost pitch. As soon as we came to close quarters, we found Prawle, with a glance of mischief in his twinkling eyes, embracing a poor little white calf, which had strayed away from its mother. The owner came in the morning and reclaimed it.





CHAPTER VIII.

Captain Spanswick's Farewell Palaver—Prawle's wonderful Feats of Horsemanship—We make a Start—Observations of the Populace—A Visit from Two Policemen—The Diggers' Wedding Excursion—Alarm of Titicaca—A general Stampede—Titicaca's Humiliation—Mysterious Disappearance of Tom Harvey and Coalscuttle—The Fifteen-foot Gully—An Execution—Camping out—A Storm comes on—Our Tent torn to Tatters—Torrents of Rain—Bread and Brandy-and-Water for Tea—The Rain abates—Lively Jemmy's Wager—Prawle accepts the Terms—How to Light a Fire on a Wet Night—Extraordinary Conduct of Señor Robinson—Flight of Titicaca—The Pursuit.

THERE is an old song which most of my readers have heard, and which my sister Lucy was fond of singing. The *refrain* runs thus :—

O ladies, beware of a gay young knight—
He loves—and he rides away.

These words came into my head when Captain Spanswick, mounted on his brown cob and looking as spick-and-span as if he and his steed had just been turned out of a band-box, rode up to our tent-door and delivered his farewell oration. Our departure had been delayed for two or three days, as we had not been able to buy some of the provisions which we wanted ; but at length everything was

ready for a start. The captain, as I have already observed, was going up the road before us as a pioneer—an *avant courier* he preferred to call himself,—and in this parting address with which he favoured us, he expatiated in glowing terms on the benefits which we should derive from his proceeding in advance of the remainder of the party.

“I have given Señor Robinson,” he observed, “exact written directions where to find me on Golden Gully; and by the time you get there you will be able to participate in the following advantages. I shall have secured a cash purchaser for the packhorses and their loads—you will simply have to deliver the animals, and pocket the money. I shall also have ‘marked out a claim,’ which, if I mistake not, will make all our fortunes.” (Prawle’s eyes glistened at these words.) “I don’t wish to boast, gentlemen, but I do not sink my shafts at haphazard, as most of these ignorant uneducated diggers do. I select my field for gold-mining operations on the strictest geological principles, as approved by Sir Roderick Murchison.”

“I have a book by Sir Roderick, which my father gave me,” whispered I to Prawle.

“Gentlemen, I believe I may safely say that on my plan we are sure of success. Three months of moderate exertion will put each of us in possession of a handsome fortune. Good-bye. I wish you all luck on the road: Mr. Prawle, might I trouble you for a light?” Prawle immediately handed his superior officer a red-hot brand from the fire, with which the gallant captain lighted his cigar. He then waved his hand gracefully to us, and cantered off in the direction of Mount Macedon.

“He loves—to talk of the diggings—and then he rides away, leaving us to shift for ourselves,” thought I to myself, recalling the words of the old song; but I did not

whisper a syllable of my discontent to Prawle or my other companions ; for I found that Captain Spanswick's farewell speech, from which I have only given a short extract, had made a vast impression upon them, and that they were fully convinced that they would very speedily have their pockets stuffed with golden nuggets. When I speak of my companions, I mean such sanguine young fellows as Harvey, Wallington, and Prawle ; for Señor Robinson was probably too old a soldier to believe that he would acquire a fortune on such easy terms. But, being a simple-minded creature, he seemed quite content that the captain should do all the talking, provided he was allowed to do all the hard work, and he muttered with evident admiration, as he rolled up some tobacco for a cigarette,—

“The captain is a very clever man, a very clever man indeed.”

The Señor had taken advantage of the delay which had occurred to train our unruly horses for their future vocation. Sham packs were constructed ; for example, a quantity of stones and pieces of wood were rolled up inside of a pair of blankets, and fastened on each animal's back in succession. Desperate, at first, was the kicking, plunging, and rearing ; but the Señor was wonderfully calm and patient, treating the horses as if they were children, and only administering blows when all other means of persuading them had been tried in vain. When, however, he did thrash he thrashed tremendously, his eyes glittered ferociously, he danced round his victim like a little demon, and left the poor animal in a lather of sweat, trembling in every limb. Prawle's yellow horse, Gamboge, and the Señor's chestnut, Titicaca, were, as he had prophesied, the most unruly of all the cavalcade, and they both underwent in consequence a severe flogging.

During these two or three days of training, Señor Gonzales Robinson carefully studied the characters of his two-legged companions, as well as those of his horses. I soon perceived that he did not esteem Harvey, and Wallington very highly. They were useful, handy, and tolerably obedient fellows, but they entertained a strong dislike to our half-wild uncertain-tempered steeds, and gave them as wide a berth as possible, preferring any occupation, such as cooking, or fetching wood and water, rather than handling the horses. As for myself, I must not sound my own praises, but I felt much pleased when the Señor said to me, "In time, Mr. Scudamore, you will learn well how to manage horses, because you are patient, and you try not to be afraid." But as for Prawle, he fairly astonished all of us. I don't believe that until he landed in Australia he had ever been across a horse in his life; indeed, he hinted that he had never bestridden any nobler animal than a Blackheath donkey, and that he had as often found himself under its belly as on its back. But now he came out in a wonderful way. Perhaps it was that his legs had grown so much longer since he was a small boy; perhaps the pure Australian air had invigorated his nerves; whatever was the cause of his courage I cannot say, I can only affirm that he leapt on the back of one horse after another, and though unprovided with saddle or bridle, and in spite of all their kicking, and bucking, and plunging, he stuck as firmly to them as the Old Man of the Mountain stuck to poor Sindbad the Sailor. Jemmy Wallington rather enviously observed that Prawle's legs were so long and so flexible that he could tie them in a double knot under his beast's stomach, and that thus he became a sort of Centaur, firmly attached to his seat. It was the greatest fun in the world to see him careering about on Camboge, without any

hat on, his hair all on end, and his great goggle eyes staring out of his head. He carried nothing in his hand but a stout stick. First, Gamboge would wheel round and round; then he would stand on his forelegs, as if he had just alighted from a leap; then he would stand on his hind legs, like a lion rampant. And, incredible as it may appear, while in this latter position, which he retained for upwards of two minutes, as if he had been educated in a circus, his rider, leaning forward so as to accommodate his long body to the singular attitude assumed by his horse, gravely addressed us in the following words: "Ladies and gentlemen, you here behold the celebrated Joao Praolo, the bare-backed Brazilian rider of the inaccessible Andes. Fearless are the feats which he will perform on the back of his utterly untrained steed Gamboge. In the first place——" Here Prawle's oration came to a sudden and ignominious end, for a new idea suggested itself to the mind of Gamboge by which he might get rid of his tormentor. He suddenly threw himself backward, and began to roll about as a donkey does when he is taking a dust-bath. It was a mercy that he did not break poor Joao Praolo's neck; but that astute native of Greenwich was too quick for him. He untwisted his legs, threw himself off, and alighted on his feet; at the same moment Señor Gonzales skilfully tossed the bight of his lasso over the mischievous animal's head, and then gave him such a basting with his heavy whip, that the poor creature remained for several hours after as sober and well-behaved as an elderly hackney-coach horse.

At length we were ready for a start. Early one morning soon after daybreak we struck our tent and packed our household implements, leaving them and Titicaca temporarily in charge of Jemmy Wallington. The other four of

us, taking the four remaining animals, then proceeded into town to load up our provisions, intending on our return to pick up Jemmy, and place the tent and blankets, and pots and pans, on Titicaca's back, who, being the least manageable of all the team, was destined to carry that part of our property which could not easily be damaged by a tumble. Our journey into town was unaccompanied by any misadventure. One after another the horses were loaded with a carefully selected cargo of provisions, and then we started on our route. We were all in high spirits; the sun shone brilliantly, making the air, which had felt very sharp at sunrise, quite warm and genial; and our cattle behaved remarkably well. The Señor marched at the head of our cavalcade, leading Jemmy's brown mare Topsy, while Prawle brought up the rear with Gamboge. On a retreat the rear is said to be the place of honour; in our present progress Prawle found it to be the place of chaff. All the idlers along the streets which we traversed were attracted by the oddity of our little Mexican commander, with his tunic of Lincoln green, and his punchy figure; but they were afraid to laugh at him, because there was such a ferocious gleam in his eye, and such a formidable pair of pistols in his belt: so they indemnified themselves by roasting our long-legged rear-guard. "I say, Lanky, give us a nobbler out of that barrel." "You've cast your near hind shoe." (This was in allusion to our horses being all unshod.) "He's a green 'un, in spite of his red face." "Yes, you can hear the emigration-peas still rattling in his inside." "I say, Long-legs, come up for your soup and bouilli." (This referred to a common summons on board a passenger ship.) Prawle answered his tormentors very good-humouredly, but we all felt glad when we were clear of the town. We could not help being new-comers in the colony,

but we did not like being twitted with the fact. At length we reached the spot where we had left Jemmy Wallington. Here I must tell you, first, what we expected to see; secondly, what we actually did see. We expected to see Jemmy waiting quietly alongside of our packages, and Titicaca with his hobbles on, busily eating his luncheon. Instead of this we perceived that the tent, blankets, and other implements had been piled in a clumsy heap on Titicaca's back, and that he was in charge of two policemen, who were, by dint of hauling and thrashing, endeavouring to urge him forward, while Jemmy Wallington stood by, the picture of bewilderment. One of the policemen was very tall, the other was very short. "Hey!" cried Señor Robinson, addressing the shorter of the two, "what are you doing with my property?"

"What am I doing?" answered the policeman, impudently. "I'm helping this young fellow's horse along the road. Very kind of us, ain't it?"

"How came you to load up Jemmy, without waiting for us?" asked Tom Harvey.

"The police made me load. They told me I was trespassing here. They say they have orders to remove all tents unless each of the owners pays five shillings a week for a squatting license."

"Is this law?" asked Señor Gonzales.

"Yes," answered the policemen.

"Then it's a shame," he exclaimed, indignantly; "a burning shame, in a country where millions of acres are lying wild and uncultivated, to compel poor creatures who have only just landed, with perhaps not a shilling to spare in their pockets, to pay such a tax."

"That's no affair of mine, Mr. Greenshirt," said the tall policeman. "My business is to see that the law is

carried out. Come, now, we don't want to be hard on you. If we chose we could take the lot of you down to the police-station, and have you fined forty shillings apiece for sleeping here last night unlicensed. We won't do that, eh, Bill?"

"No," answered the other. "Square us with half a crown apiece, and a drop of something out of one of those barrels, and we'll say nothing more about it."

Here Prawle whispered something to me. "I say, mister constable," he then said, addressing the tall policeman, "didn't you come out on board the *Ruth Hayward*, and isn't your name Jackson?"

The tall policeman looked rather foolish, and let go of Titicaca's halter, which was fortunately immediately taken by Señor Robinson.

"Ah, I see you are Mr. Jackson," continued Prawle. "I hope the twins are well, and I hope they pay you better here than they did when you were pacing up and down Great Scotland Street, Liverpool?"

"Have you forgotten, Mr. Jackson," said I, "that on board ship you used to accuse Hennessy and me unjustly of giving you short weight? Are you treating us justly now in trying to screw a bribe out of us?"

"I was only chaffing ye, Master Scudamore," answered Jackson, with an uneasy laugh. "Sure I reckonised ye the first moment ye came up. Come along, Bill." And away went the two men in blue.

"A couple of scoundrels," muttered Señor Robinson. "They are paid to keep the law, and they only think how to fill their own pockets. Let us make a start."

Now this rencontre with these two policemen, trifling as it may appear, caused several subsequent misfortunes. Titicaca's load had been clumsily packed, and insecurely

fastened on his back. The result was, that before we had travelled half a mile, it gradually swayed over to one side, and then fell off. Titicaca plunged and reared, and gave vent to the most extravagant demonstrations of delight. His gestures seemed to infect his comrades, who had hitherto been quite well-behaved, with treasonable views. They grew very restive and impatient during the delay that occurred while Titicaca's load was being repacked and replaced on his back. And now a fresh cause of disturbance appeared. Suddenly we heard the sound of approaching wheels, of loud laughter, and of discordant music. In a few moments a cloud of dust became visible, and out of the cloud of dust there successively emerged three shabby-looking open carriages drawn by four horses each. The horses' heads and the drivers' coats were ornamented with white satin favours, and the same ornaments were worn by the occupants of the carriages, who, with the exception of two ladies, were all of the male sex, and all carried bottles in their hands. In the first vehicle, which was the state carriage, appeared a tan-faced digger in a bran-new plaid jumper and corduroy trousers; by his side sat a bold-faced lady with her bare hands all sparkling with rings, and a brilliant coloured shawl wrapped round her shoulders. These were the bride and bridegroom. A lucky digger had got married, and he was now scattering a few ounces of gold in entertaining his friends and driving about the neighbourhood of Melbourne. In the last carriage there were a fiddler, a trombone-player, and a little old one-eyed man who performed on the bag pipes. The united sound of these three instruments, added to the shouts and laughter of the wedding-party, was too much for the nerves of our lately-caught New South Wālers: Titicaca gave the signal of revolt by suddenly tossing his head, and jerking the halter out of Tom Harvey's

hand ; the others followed his example, and a general stampede ensued. Señor Robinson, who was busily replacing Titicaca's burden, received a severe kick in the stomach, which laid him prostrate. Prawle threw himself on Gamboge's back, hanging over, with his head on one side and his heels on the other, as if he had been part of the pack ; Miss Lucy, having freed herself from my control, ran to the nearest gum-tree and began to rub her burden against it till she had worn a hole in the bag of sugar on which I hoped to make a profit of two hundred per cent. Suddenly Señor Robinson raised himself from the ground, jumped on Coalscuttle's back, and went in quest of the fugitives. After half an hour's exciting chase he brought down both Titicaca and Lucy with the lasso. He then said sternly, "Titicaca is the cause of all this mischief ; he must be punished." We were curious to see the nature of this punishment. It was after this manner : Having put a bit in Titicaca's mouth, and a bridle over his head, the Señor fastened the end of his lasso to the bit, and taking up his position on a level piece of ground with the other end of the lasso in his hand, he lunged him round and round, administering merciless blows with his heavy whip whenever the horse showed any signs of slackening his pace. After half an hour of this exercise, he paused, and, gathering up a handful of dust, forced open Titicaca's jaws, and crammed the unwelcome dose into his mouth.

"I have made him eat dirt," cried the Señor triumphantly ; "he is punished enough."

Titicaca now became as meek as a lamb, suffered his load to be replaced on his back, and took his place in the line of march with perfect docility.

"Titicaca will never forget that," the Señor afterwards observed. "It is the greatest disgrace you can



"He is punished enough."

inflict upon a horse. 'See how he shrinks when I go near him.'

The Señor was full of superstitions, derived both from the East and West. For my part, I am inclined to think that Titicaca trembled because he had been flogged so severely, and that the dirt-eating ceremony made very little impression upon him—but I may be wrong.

We now travelled onwards for some time without meeting with any serious mishap. Still, our progress was but slow. The country was in a transition state from its winter to its summer aspect. On elevated spots the road was dry and dusty; in the hollows it was up to the horses' hocks in stiff mud. Owing to the perpetual jolting the packages became disarranged, and a halt was proclaimed at frequent intervals for the purpose of tightening straps, and so forth. In this manner the day began to wear away; and, though we had not marched ten miles from town, the sun was already approaching the western horizon.

Tom Harvey, though a new chum, had a keen eye for a convenient camping-ground. Besides, his black horse, Coalscuttle, was the swiftest and most docile of our team. Señor Robinson, with the intuitive genius of a commanding officer, had by this time made himself master of our strong and our weak points. So he said,—

"Mr. Harvey, before another hour we must camp out for the night. Be kind enough to push on ahead, and select a suitable place."

"All right, Captain," replied Harvey, and, changing his pace to double-quick time, led the good-tempered Coalscuttle forward at a brisk amble.

Although we were so near a large city, the country around us was uncultivated and uninclosed. At present, Melbourne, like most other cities, is surrounded by a wide

belt of corn-fields and market-gardens ; but in those days, those spots only were cultivated which lay on the banks of permanent streams, or which were of exceptional fertility ; all the other settled districts of the colony were devoted to sheep and cattle runs. The region which we were at present traversing was rather bare of trees. We were descending a long, low hill, at the bottom of which was to be seen a belt of scrubby bushes, while on the other side a gentle undulation appeared, entirely devoid of timber. Consequently, as soon as Harvey had traversed the narrow belt of scrub at the bottom, we naturally expected to see him and Coalscuttle reappear upon the rising ground in front of us. But neither horse nor man became visible.

"I wonder what he's stopping for?" asked Jemmy Wallington.

"Giving Coalscuttle a feed, I expect," answered Prawle.

"He has most likely chosen that patch of scrub for a camping-ground," said the Señor. "There is sure to be water there. But I should like to push on for another hour. Coo-ey!" he shouted.

Some seconds elapsed before a faint "cooey" reached our ears in reply. It seemed to proceed from the bowels of the earth. We pushed hastily forward till we got among the scrubby bushes at the bottom of the gentle declivity down which we had travelled. We then perceived that our further progress was temporarily arrested by a deep gully. Now, an Australian gully needs a brief description, because I am not aware that anything exactly like it is to be found in this country. But everybody has seen those deep cracks which occur in fields where the soil is stiff and clayey, during a dry summer. The Australian gullies resemble these cracks on a gigantic scale. They are sometimes fifteen or twenty feet deep, and not more than

Six or eight feet wide at the top. In the winter, or after heavy falls of rain, a torrent of turbid water rushes along their bottom, but towards the end of summer they become perfectly dry. As our journey took place during the medium season of spring, a stream of water, some six inches or a foot deep, was running along the bottom of the gully, and in this stream was sitting our friend, Tom Harvey, with a very disconsolate countenance, washing away the blood from a cut in his forehead. Everybody eagerly shouted out, "Are you badly hurt, Tom?" and "How came you down there?"

"I'm not much hurt," he answered; "only a scratch or two. I'll reply to your other question when I've climbed out of this abominable pit. The sides are as steep as a chimney."

Presently Tom found a place where the sides were more sloping, and contrived to scramble out.

"Where's Coalscuttle?" demanded Señor Gonzales Robinson, the moment he reached the bank.

And this was Tom's reply:

"I jumped over the gully quite easily at a spot where the sides were completely overhanging, and where the chasm was not more than four feet wide. I was still holding Coalscuttle's halter, and encouraged him to jump likewise. He made a spring very obediently, but he did not leap as I should imagine he ought to have leapt. Perhaps the load on his back, or the halter, bothered him. At any rate, his hind feet alighted close to the edge of the chasm; the soil gave way, and he slipped backwards into the gulf. I fell upon him, but luckily rolled clear of him. You'll find him some distance above here. I worked my way down stream, in hopes of finding some means of getting out."

We found poor Coalscuttle in a melancholy plight, moaning piteously.

He was literally jammed, head and stern, across the chasm, at a distance of about five feet from the surface, and about ten feet from the bottom of the gully. Señor Robinson, having made one end of his lasso fast round the root of a prickly-mimosa bush, fastened the other end round his waist, and bade us lower him cautiously down. Of course, during this interval we had clapped the hobbles on the other horses. We lowered the Señor down, till he reached the level where Coalscuttle lay. He then proceeded to make a careful examination, removed the pack from the horse's back, and passed it up to us.

"Enough," he said, presently. "Lift me out." We did so. "It is as I feared," he said: "his near foreleg is broken. We can do nothing for him. It is a thousand pities, for he is our most useful horse. Better put him out of his pain at once."

"Can't we pull him out?" asked Tom Harvey.

"We could, if we had three upright pieces of timber on which to rig a windlass. But it would occupy half a day, and what would be the use of a three-legged horse? We could not take him with us, and if we left him behind us, he would die in agony from slow starvation. There is but one cure for his complaint. It is this."

As he spoke he deliberately drew one of his pistols from his belt, cocked it, and held it at about six feet from the doomed animal's head.

He pulled the trigger, it snapped, but there was no report.

"Poor old Coaly," muttered Prawle, "I'd really begun to grow fond of you. Had it been that vicious yellow scoundrel of mine, I should not have cared so much."

The Mexican replaced the defective percussion-cap by another, and again pulled the trigger. A flash, a cloud of white smoke, followed by a convulsive start and a hollow groan. When the smoke cleared away, we saw to our surprise that the dead horse had sunk to the bottom of the gully. His death-agony had wrenched him from the chasm in which he had been imbedded. He now lay partially covered by the water, whose clear stream was discoloured by his ebbing life-blood.

"Young gentlemen," said the Mexican sternly, "when you have looked upon the faces of as many dead men as I have, you will not stand staring at the carcase of a dead horse. Come, we must turn to, and put up the tent at once. The sun is setting, and setting, too, in a bank of clouds, which promises a dirty night."

Upon hearing these words, we set to work with a will, and in a few minutes had the tent pitched in as sheltered a corner as we could find, under a canopy of mimosa-bushes, for the wind was already beginning to howl ominously. Harvey lighted the fire—not a very prosperous one, for there was no timber at hand larger than small sticks and twigs; but it was big enough to boil a "billy" of water, and to fry a beefsteak for our supper. We were all uncommonly sharp-set, for we had had a laborious and exciting day, and we had eaten nothing since our early breakfast. But just as the water in our billy was becoming blood-warm, and as Harvey was preparing to scald out the frying-pan—just at this important juncture, the air grew dark, partly from the shadow of approaching night, but more because a dense canopy of threatening clouds had covered the sky. At the same time the wind increased in force, bringing with it some heavy drops of rain.

"I say, Prawle," said Harvey, "do you want any tea to-night?"

"Tea? I should rather think I do. And beefsteak too. Why, with the exception of breakfast this morning, to-morrow will be the third day since I have tasted food."

"Then I'll tell you what some of you fellows must do. You must hold a jacket over the fire, to keep the rain off, while I cook."

"Willingly," cried Prawle, suiting the action to the word, by stripping off his outer garment, and exposing himself to the rain, which was pouring down in torrents.

"O yes! O yes!" cried old Daddy Longlegs, who never missed an opportunity of raising a laugh, "this is to give notice that John Prawle, Esquire, formerly of Goree Piazzas, Liverpool, but now of the wild and trackless Bush, Australia Felix—oh! ain't it Felix, mates?—is about to martyrize himself for the benefit of the community at large, by exposing himself to rheumatism in the small of his back. Permit me to ask an important question, Monsieur Alexis Soyer," he continued, addressing our cook—"Is Sukey beginning to sing yet?"

"Her name is Billy out in the colonies," observed Lively Jemmy.

"Yes, old boy," answered Harvey, "Billy is beginning to sing most melodiously, and in five minutes more, if you hold the jacket as well as you're doing now, he will attain the boiling-point."

Alas for Tom Harvey's sanguine anticipations! At that moment a tremendous blast of wind, exceeding in violence anything that we had hitherto experienced, came roaring down the sides of the hill. As soon as it reached us, it nearly blew old Prawle off his legs into the fire, and, what was worse, it blew the jacket which he was holding com-

pletely out of his hands, just as a furious puff of wind at sea blows a sail out of the earings. Misfortunes never come singly, says the old proverb; at the same moment Tom Harvey, making a sudden dash to catch the precious garment, as it flew past him, kicked over the kettle, spilt all the water, which was just about to boil, and put the fire nearly out. The flood of rain which followed this tornado soon completed its extinction. But the wind did worse harm than this. I had just been giving each of the horses in succession a feed of oats after their day's work, when as I was returning towards the tent, almost unable to keep my legs, I suddenly saw our flimsy tent fly up in the air, and split into ribbons. We were now almost shelterless; but we did all we could to prevent further damage to our stores and provisions by unrolling our blankets, and stretching them across the mimosa-trees. For two hours after this the rain streamed down in a gloomy and incessant deluge. That we were all wet to the skin was a mere trifle; it was a far more serious matter that my beloved bag of sugar was turned to the consistence of treacle. As for the loaves of bread which we had brought up from town for our own eating, they were saturated with water like so many sponges.

"What is to be done?" at length asked Jemmy Wallington, as we all stood crouching in a heap under the sorry shelter afforded by our soaked blankets. "We are all as hungry as hunters, we can't make any tea, and I don't think we're quite savage enough to eat a raw beefsteak. What's to be done?"

"We must make our supper," answered the Mexican, "on bread and water, flavoured with a little brandy."

When I used to sit on a blazing hot summer's day in the dusty old schoolroom at Harlington poring over my Latin exercise, and every now and then glancing out of window

to catch a glimpse of the glittering sea, I used to think how delightful it must be to live perpetually in the woods in some region where Virgil and Homer had never been heard of, where the Greek grammar was unknown, and where there was no cane except the sweet juicy sugar-cane. But when indulging in these day-dreams, I was apt to forget that even in those delicious woods the weather was sometimes very unpleasant, and that there were times and seasons when the despised schoolroom at Harlington would be a very agreeable refuge. These thoughts came into my head now, as I sat squatting like a frog on the damp and oozy earth with a corner of our tattered tent over my head, munching a lump of bread which was perfectly saturated with water, and drinking cold brandy-and-water out of a pannikin, into which the rain-drops splashed even while I was conveying it to my mouth.

We had no fear of being visited by horse-thieves on such a night as this ; for dishonest persons have quite as much objection to getting wet through as anybody else. Besides, the night was very dark, and we had no light to attract the attention of passers-by. Accordingly, we left our nags to look after themselves, and found that they remained perfectly quiet, standing during the most violent part of the storm under the shelter afforded by the mimosa-bushes. As for ourselves, notwithstanding the rain, we could have become very jolly if we had only had a fire ; but being fireless, wet to the skin, and chilled to the bone, we could not pump up a large supply of animal spirits. Prawle called upon Lively Jemmy for a song, and Jemmy began with the well-known bacchanalian ditty—

“ Three jolly postboys were drinking at the Dragon.”

But when he reached the chorus, “ For to-night we’ll merry

be!" his teeth chattered so painfully that he was obliged to desist. Prawle suggested that he had better try an Ethiopian melody, as an accompaniment *on the bones* would exactly suit that sort of song. Señor Gonzales Robinson sat very mum and quiet, for he was not a man much given to conversation. For a long time he was unable to light a pipe, and used up nearly a box of matches in endeavouring to strike fire, everything was so penetrated with wet; but at last he kindled a flame; and then we had the satisfaction of watching the little red spot of fire under his nose, and trying to fancy that it diffused a perceptible amount of heat among the assembled company. The Señor was ordinarily an extremely temperate man, but on the present occasion he managed to swallow a considerable quantity of spirits. For some time, however, it produced no effect on his outward behaviour, except to make him unusually silent and reserved.

By degrees the wind lulled, the rain ceased falling, and a few pale stars twinkled feebly through the misty canopy which covered the sky. All of us, except Señor Robinson, got up, shook ourselves, and began to beat our breasts with our arms, after the fashion of coachmen and watermen.

"Come and look at the gully," said Prawle.

It was too dark for us to see much; but we could hear that there was a raging torrent of water sweeping along its channel. If the best swimmer in the world had tumbled in now, as Tom Harvey tumbled in before the rain began, no earthly power could have saved his life.

"I vote we light a fire," observed Lively Jemmy.

"A fire!" returned Prawle, rather scornfully. "Don't I wish we may get it! A ship's crew becalmed on the equator might as well say, 'Let us manufacture a hundred-weight of ice.'"

"And so they could, with the aid of chemicals."

"Granted, my ingenious friend. ' But where are our chemicals for lighting a fire on such a night as this? Every twig is soaked with wet."

"What will you bet me," said Jemmy, "that in an hour from this time I don't have a fire big enough to roast a prize ox?"

"I'll bet you an ounce of gold—the first gold we dig," answered Prawle, courageously.

"Done, done."

And the two shook hands over the bargain.

"Now then," said Jemmy, "I've no time to lose. You come along with me, Scudamore, and bring your tomahawk with you. We're going to take an evening stroll together."

By this time the heavy storm-clouds had pretty nearly rolled away, the wind had subsided to a calm, and the stars were shining more brightly. So, although it was rather a dark night, surrounding objects were not altogether indistinguishable.

"The success of my bet," observed Jemmy, as he led me swiftly along, "depends on my finding something. I noticed the said something as we came along this evening, and I must try and discover it again."

Every time that we came near a tree, Jemmy went up to it and examined it carefully; but on each occasion he returned saying rather dolefully,—

"It won't do; I shall lose my ounce of gold."

At last, when we had got to a distance of about half a mile from our encampment, Jemmy ran up to a big tree, and exclaimed joyfully, "This is the jocky for me! Bring your tomahawk, Stephen. Now then," said he, "I've been a few days longer in the colony than you and Prawle, and I'll tell you a useful wrinkle which an old chum taught me before I

left Melbourne. You see this tree ; it is called a stringy bark. I'll show you why." He pulled off a piece of the outer rind as he spoke, and pointed out that between this rind and the actual body of the tree there was a layer of a fibrous substance, several inches thick, strongly resembling oakum. "No matter," said Jemmy, "how wet the weather may be,—these trees wear Nature's waterproof coats, and the lining of their jackets is always dry. This inner bark will burn like so much tinder. We'll astonish old Prawle before the night is over."

Accordingly, with the tomahawk we cut off as much of the stringy bark as we could conveniently carry, and then returned to our desolate camping-ground, which we should not have found so easily if Prawle had not very considerably kept up a continuous cooeing, "like a jolly old barn-owl," as Jemmy expressed it.

"Now," said Jemmy, "I promised to have a big fire in an hour's time, but I didn't promise to gather the wood for it. You, Tom Harvey and Jack Prawle, must go and collect all the timber you can find. There are plenty of dead limbs lying on the hill yonder. Off with you at once : we don't want you to see our magical processes. Is the Señor still asleep?"

"Fast as a church, under the blankets," answered Tom Harvey. "I suppose he's accustomed to this sort of fun, and can sleep wet or dry. I can't." And with these words he and Prawle departed in search of firewood.

With the aid of the stringy bark it was very easy to light a fire, provided we could find a dry lucifer match ; for we did not possess a flint and steel, though the latter, in thinly-peopled countries, are much safer to carry than the best of congreves ; because, if your lucifers get wet, you can't buy any more.

First, Jemmy "teased" out two or three handfuls of the stringy bark as fine as possible. He then attempted to strike a light. Señor Gonzales had been so wasteful over his pipes that we had only seventeen matches left. Jemmy scratched fifteen of these, one after another. They all either refused to ignite, or went out with a feeble sputter the moment after being lighted.

"I begin to feel very nervous," said Jemmy. "I don't care for losing the ounce of gold, but I don't like to be beaten. We've only two chances left. Here goes!"

"Hurrah!" The sixteenth match kept alight just long enough to set fire to the handful of "teased" bark which I held. It was especially lucky, for we afterwards found that the seventeenth match had lost its chemical head. I placed the burning mass on the ground upon the spot selected by my mate, and cautiously added more bark. The flame mounted steadily, gained strength, and gave out a grateful heat. We now added a bundle of slender twigs. They were very wet, and for a minute they smouldered and struggled, emitting a dense white smoke; but presently, aided by fresh supplies of bark, they burst into flame. We next ventured to pile on some branches as thick as a man's finger. They were a long time catching, and we used all the rest of our precious bark in enabling them to take fire. But by this time Jemmy pronounced our experiment to be successful.

"We only want wood, and we'll roast the prize ox I talked of. Hurrah! here they come, loaded with timber."

"Well," cried Prawle, "I must confess myself licked. If you're not the Wizard of the North, Jemmy, you must be the Wizard of the Antipodes. My ounce of gold begins to look foolish."

"Don't talk," answered Jemmy, "but cut away as hard

as you can, and fetch more wood. You'll find this modest little fire of mine to be what the penny-a-liners call 'a devouring elephant' presently. Away with you, and you too, Scudamore: I'll stop and feed the fire."

Prawle and I returned in ten minutes' time, carrying a large twisted limb between us. It was as big round as a man's thigh.

"Is this too big?" we asked.

"Not a bit. Lay it on carefully. By the time you've made another trip you'll find it charred halfway through."

Jemmy was right. By the time we returned again a glorious fire was burning, throwing out such a glowing heat that we were obliged to keep at a respectful distance from it. Señor Gonzales Robinson had roused himself, or had been roused by Jemmy, from his watery couch; but the brandy which he had drunk and the unwonted warmth of the fire had combined to render him very drowsy, and, instead of displaying his usual soldier-like alertness, he squatted on one of the logs which Prawle had fetched, and looked, while in that position, uncommonly like a gigantic toad. Seeing that he was so lethargic, we determined to let our commanding officer enjoy himself after his own fashion, although there was enough work to do to keep everybody busy. All our wet blankets and the tattered remains of our unlucky tent were brought and spread out at a safe distance from the fire, the stores were examined, and those which had been wetted by the rain were placed where they would become gradually dry. As for our four nags, they all instinctively drew near the fire, and seemed inclined to become quite sociable.

Tom Harvey had already boiled a billy of water and made some hot tea, but we were sadly disappointed to find that there was no beefsteak for supper. During the

confusion that ensued when the tent was blown to pieces, Tom Harvey left our meet on the ground, and forgot it, and, as it was now nowhere to be seen, we made no doubt that the native oats (mischievous little spotted creatures of the weasel tribe) had crept out of their holes as soon as the rain cleared up, and had run away with it. However, we contrived to make a very good supper, compared to the disconsolate meal with which we had begun the evening. We had plenty of hot tea, and we toasted our saturated bread. Señor Robinson roused himself when he saw supper ready. He ate some toast and drank a pannikin of tea; then he drank some more brandy, lighted a pipe, and began to troll out some lugubrious Mexican ditty with an energy that astonished us. His eyes twinkled and his flat negro-like features became quite animated. Had he stopped with this display of exhilaration, all would have been well. But presently the animation extended from his face to his body and legs. He sprang from his seat and began to execute a sort of barbarous fandango. Not content with this, he caught up the gnarled limb on which he had been sitting, and whirled it swiftly round and round his head. He was enormously strong, in spite of his dwarfish stature, for this log of wood, I should think, weighed more than a hundredweight. Now, what demon had entered into the usually staid and respectable Señor Gonzales Robinson I cannot conceive, unless it was the demon of Cognac, which had first rendered him sleepy, then noisy, and then mischievous; for suddenly, with a shrill cry, like that of an Indian war-whoop, he ceased his dance, and flung the tremendous club which he had been wielding, with all his force, right into the middle of Jemmy Wallington's roaring furnace. A million of brilliant sparks at once leapt into the air; the horses sprang aside and

whinnied with terror ; Titicaca was so frightened and struggled so violently that he pulled the pin which held him by main force out of the ground and darted away. Unfortunately we had not hobbled him this evening ; the rain had come on so suddenly as to confuse all our arrangements : so Titicaca's legs were perfectly free, and in a moment he had disappeared in the surrounding darkness.

. This unfortunate mishap seemed to have the effect of sobering Señor Robinson : he at once went in search of his lasso, and without another word, except when he muttered that, next to the unlucky Coalscuttle, Titicaca was the best horse he had, he jumped on the back of Topsy, Jemmy Wallington's brown mare, and started off in pursuit of the runaway.





CHAPTER IX.

The Mexican's Search for Titicaca—Discovery of his Foot-tracks—The Grains of Corn—The Encampment—Evidently the Scene of a Tragedy—The Entrance of the Black Forest—Its Alleged Dangers—Prawle's Spirited Appeal—We plunge into the Bush—We make Acquaintance with some Birds—Our Astonishment on hearing the Settlers' Clocks striking for the First Time—Brackish Water—A Solitary Stroll by Moonlight—The Frogs' Chorus—A Young Female mistakes me for her Sweetheart—We come on a Party of Diggers—Their Extraordinary Behaviour towards Señor Robinson—Tiger's Grave—The Funeral Oration—Arrival of a Messenger—Great News—To Horse and Away!—The Señor offers to catch Dick Potter's Horse—Señor Gonzales Robinson hurls his Lasso, and, for once in his Life, does not catch a Horse—Mr. Potter's Astonishment—A Transfer of Property—The Señor becomes Bloodthirsty—Lively Jemmy's Pluckiness—Potter protests his Innocence, and, wonderful to tell, points the Way to his own Dungeon—Arrival at Carambong Creek—The Police Barracks—The Three Troopers—Señor Robinson's ceremonious Address—Astonishment of the Police—Potter's Explanation—Señor Robinson's wounded Feelings—Satisfaction demanded.

THE sun had risen high in the heavens, we had eaten our frugal breakfast, and we had begun to think that we should never see Señor Gonzales Robinson or Topsy again—to say nothing of Titicaca—when our gallant commander came riding into camp on the back of the former, looking rather weary and disconsolate. “I will

never touch brandy again," were the first words he uttered. He then narrated his adventures. Having a very quick ear, he had hoped to recapture Titicaca by following the sound of his footsteps, and for more than half an hour had kept on his track, though unable to come up with him. The sound of the runaway's hoofs had then become fainter and fainter, and had at length passed altogether out of hearing. The Señor then endeavoured to find his way back to our camping-ground, but he had ridden off in such hot haste, and had taken such a circuitous route that he had paid no attention to any landmarks as he galloped along. He was accordingly obliged to rest under a tree until the daylight dawned, and not the least hardship that he had to encounter while in this position was that he had no matches in his pocket, and consequently was unable to strike a light, and solace himself with a pipe of tobacco. As soon as daylight appeared he was able to form some notion of the direction which he had taken, and was about to return to camp, when unfortunately, perhaps, for his peace of mind, he came across the impressions of Titicaca's feet. There was no possibility of mistaking them, for not only are the greater number of Australian horses provided with shoes, while ours, as I have already stated, were unshod, but there was a peculiar curve in the shape of one of Titicaca's hoofs which was at once recognized by the practised eye of the Mexican *caballero*. For two miles or more he painfully followed this track. In the soft ground of the hollows it was clearly and sharply defined, on the hard ground of the uplands it was more faintly marked, but was still discernible to the vision of an experienced forest-ranger. But at length the route taken by our runaway steed led the Señor across the broad line of march taken by the innumerable pilgrims proceeding to and from the diggings of Bendigo and Mount

Alexander. It soon became impossible to follow it ; it was lost among the treadings of the thousand feet of men, bullocks, and horses, to say nothing of the perpetual wheel-tracks with which the country was scarred. The Señor's keen eye had, however, observed something which made him think it worth while to retrace his steps, and follow Titicaca's hoof-marks in the reverse direction, back to the spot where he had first perceived them. He had noticed, but without paying much attention at the time to the fact, that for the first mile or so, Titicaca's footsteps had meandered about in a zigzag circuitous fashion, while latterly their course had been almost in a straight line. What did this mean ? A more rigorous examination of the ground seemed to solve the mystery. He observed that, allowing for the comparative hardness or softness of the ground at any particular point, the footsteps were more deeply and distinctly imprinted where they pursued a direct course than where they wandered about at random. From these two facts the Señor drew an important conclusion. He judged that during the earlier part of his flight Titicaca had travelled at his own pace, and in whatever direction he pleased, but that during the latter part of his course he had had a rider on his back ! The next point was to discover where that rider mounted him. It was not very difficult to find this out, when once the clue had been given. At a particular point Titicaca had evidently paused to crop a few mouthfuls of grass. Human footsteps were visible near this spot ; Señor Robinson bent down and examined the ground closely. Presently he picked up several small objects, and looked at them, I have no doubt, with an eye that twinkled with satisfaction, now that the worst was known. These small objects were grains of oats, and it was evident that while Titicaca was peacefully attempting to brace the nerves

which had been so discomposed by Señor Robinson's rash display of fireworks by partaking of breakfast, some person or persons had come forward, and had seduced him from his proper allegiance by offering him a breakfast of a far more toothsome character. Further search produced further evidence. Within a few hundred paces of the spot where the grains of corn had been picked up, Señor Robinson found the remains of a large fire, which had evidently been extinguished by the heavy rain of the previous night. Near the fire a tent had been pitched; the ground covered by it was very dry, showing that it had been occupied probably for several successive days, while the appearance of the holes in which the tent-pegs had been fastened proved that the tent had been removed that very morning, since the great fall of rain. But the most singular discovery of all still remains to be mentioned. From the pocket of his Lincoln-green blouse or "jumper" Señor Robinson drew, with great solemnity, a piece of linen stained dark-red, and with a small circular hole in it.

"I found this," he said, "on the extinguished embers of the fire. It has not been wetted by the rain, or the edge of the red stain would not be so sharply marked. It has been thrown on the fire by some person who wished to burn it, and who thought the fire was still alight. Now do you know what it is?"

"Well," said Prawle, "it looks to me, Señor, uncommonly like the breast of a fine linen shirt."

"Right. And these stains are blood, and this hole is a bullet-hole. Some queer work has been done where that tent was pitched last night!"

"Oughtn't we to inform the police?" asked Jimmy Wallington.

"Bah! I have no love for the police," grunted the Señor.

"Of what use are they to us? If we went to them we should only waste our time, and receive no thanks. If they could help me to find Titicaca, I should feel obliged to them."

Soon after this we started, but did not perform a very good day's journey, for we had set out late in the day, and we had only three horses to accomplish the work of five; and one of these three—namely, Prawle's friend Gamboge—was of very little use. We met with no adventures worth speaking of for some time, and on the evening of the following day, after traversing the dreary plains of Keilor, we reached the borders of the Black Forest.

I don't feel sure whether it is called the Black Forest because it bears a fancied resemblance to the famous woodland region of that name in Germany, or whether it was so named on account of a celebrated bush-fire which desolated the country on a certain Thursday in February, 1851. I was unable to see any great difference between it and most other wooded districts of the colony. I know we were very glad to escape from those naked, treeless plains, where the sun blazes pitilessly upon you by day, and the wind at night cuts through you like a knife; where we used to pick up every scrap of wood we could find, even if it were no bigger than one's finger, for the sake of boiling our kettle; and where, when we made our midday halt, we used to request old Prawle, in the interests of humanity, because he was the tallest of the party, to stand upright and motionless like a pillar, in order that we might lie in his shadow. You may ask why we didn't lie in the shadow of our horses. The reason was that they all had an ugly trick of letting out with their hind legs if a gadfly disturbed them, and it was not exactly pleasant, while in the act of sipping a scalding pannikin of tea, to receive a thundering crack

between your shoulders which sent you spinning head over heels;

If we had listened to all the advice we received from parties coming from the diggings, I am sure we should have turned back in despair.

"No good going up, mates," they used to say.. "All the gold has been dug. Provisions are at famine prices, and in another month's time there won't be a drop of water to make your tea with, let alone 'washing up your dirt.'" To one piece of news, however, we thought it worth while to pay some attention. Everybody unanimously pronounced the Black Forest a dangerous region. More outrages and robberies were perpetrated there than on any other part of the road, and there were two or three roadside taverns, mentioned to us by name, which were declared to be the haunt of villains of the most desperate reputation. The only safe plan, people said, for traversing this district, was to go up in parties forty or fifty strong. And this was what we actually beheld on arriving at the entrance of the forest. Several small parties of two or three persons were seated patiently waiting by the roadside, until a sufficient number had accumulated to render travelling safe. Prawle, who managed to extract some fun out of everything, declared that it reminded him of a visit to the Tower of London, where the beefeaters make sightseers wait in a row until a dozen or more persons are collected. Then, and not till then, they take them round to see the lions. But Prawle did more than laugh at these imaginary terrors, for such he declared them to be. He proposed an entirely different plan of operations in a neat and effective speech, which I here reproduce from memory:—

"Mates," he began, "mates, I once more repeat, for I scorn and loathe the appellation 'gentlemen,' now that we

have entered upon the wild and trackless bush—— Excuse the digression, mates, but how rum that yellow waggon yonder, marked Figgins's celebrated ginger beer, 264, Little Burke Street, Melbourne—how rum it looks in the midst of the wild and trackless bush! The refinements of civilization and the savagery of the wilderness are brought into the most singular juxta——” (“Question, question,” cried Tom Harvey, who, having once witnessed a debate in the House of Commons, entertained very strict notions of Parliamentary decorum). “The honourable member for Huddersfield” (this was in allusion to Tom's native place) “charges me with not keeping to the question. Sir,—I mean Gentlemen of the Jury,—I beg your pardon, I mean Mates, I *will* keep to the question, and I fearlessly tell that honourable gentleman, at the same time humbly requesting him to leave a drop of tea in the pannikin for a thirsty orator, that I *have* kept to the question. Mates, I spoke just now of the wild and trackless bush; I used those epithets in a spirit of mockery and derision, for the simple reason that we have never yet set eyes on the real bush. We have been perpetually in the company of human beings. Our path is scored with footsteps. Hitherto, instead of communing with Nature, as I had fondly hoped to do, I have felt as if I was in Fleet-street, with all the shops shut and the pavement in the possession of the gas-pipe menders. Mates,” continued the honourable member for Liverpool, with increasing indignation, “I haven't set eyes on a wild animal since I landed in the colony, barring those beastly black and white magpies, which ain't magpies at all, but only carrion crows.” (“Hear, hear,” from Lively Jemmy.) “I quitted the shores of Albion with my imagination filled full of kangaroos, and emus, and duck-billed platypuses. I haven't seen one. I haven't even set eyes on a cockatoo. The honourable member

for Mexico has just whispered in my ear that he saw a green parrot that morning when he was hunting for Titicaca, but I suspect it was only a dickey-bird. Now it's plain to me that we shall never see anything worth looking at if we stick to the beaten track to which everybody else sticks. I beg, therefore, to submit a proposition to the sense of this honourable house. The regular road to the diggings can't be more than three or four miles wide. Outside of that commonplace region of dust, mudholes, burnt logs, liquor-shanties, refreshment-tents, horses, bullocks, diggers, and priggers—if I may apply such a term to the bushranging fraternity—outside of that commonplace region, I repeat, Nature must still exist in full feather, disturbed only by the occasional crack of the stockman's whip, or by the pipe of the wandering shepherd. Mates, in plain English, let us cut the main road, let us plunge half a dozen or a dozen miles into the bush, and make our way to Bendigo in an independent fashion. With stout hearts, and Jemmy Wallington's pocket compass, we can accomplish anything."

Prawle's speech was lustily cheered, and loudly approved of by everybody except the only experienced forester of our party—namely, Señor Gonzales Robinson.

"We have already lost two horses," he said, gloomily.

"Exactly," answered Prawle boldly. "We lost those two horses by keeping to the ordinary vulgar track. Diverge from the ordinary vulgar track, and you will see that you will lose no more horses."

The Mexican shook his head, but we were four to one, we were all young and sanguine, so we overruled him, and, instead of at once entering the forest, we steered in a due westerly direction, and before many hours, as Prawle had rightly foretold, we had got beyond all traces of the eager crowd which was perpetually passing between the metro-

polis and the gold-mines. After making, as far as we could judge, fully a dozen miles of westing, we once more turned our horses' heads north-north-west, and presently perceived, by the increasing size of the trees, and the gradual elevation of the ground, that we had entered upon the southern slope of the Great Dividing Range, which runs right across the colony of Victoria, and which is partially occupied by the so-called Black Forest.

Nothing can be more desolate, and at the same time more vulgar, in my opinion, than the aspect of a region which Man has only entered for purposes of destruction, and upon which he has not cared to bestow any cultivation or embellishment. Some of the small Australian towns in those days were hideously repulsive places. The trees which once lent some freshness and beauty to the spot had been ruthlessly cut down either for firewood or for building purposes, and their blackened stumps and mangled limbs still disfigured the uncultivated soil ; all the natural grass had been trodden into mud or powdered into dust by incessant traffic. Nobody attempted to grow vegetables, there was not a patch of flower-garden to be seen, for everybody was absorbed in the thirst for gold. If the inhabitants were not themselves miners, they devoted their energies to supplying such things as miners wanted, and in those days flowers and even vegetables were reckoned useless luxuries. Remember, I am speaking of sixteen or seventeen years ago, since which time the colony of Victoria has made wonderful progress in all the arts of civilization.

Prawle had soon no reason to complain of the want of *feræ naturæ*—that is to say, of living creatures in a state of nature. We could not expect to see quadrupeds during the daytime, for the Australian quadrupeds are nocturnal. But

I think this is the case with wild animals all over the world, except perhaps, with those that approach in kind to our domestic creatures, such as wild goats, wild asses, and buffaloes. When the Psalmist speaks of the night as the time "wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth," he utters a truth applicable not only to Palestine, but also to America and Australia. But though the four-footed beasts are all inveterate night prowlers, the birds are generally fond of daylight and sunlight, and we soon saw plenty of them. To begin with dickey-birds, as old Prawle rather contemptuously styled them. We soon made friends with the Australian robin, a lively little fellow, nearly as saucy and familiar as his British brother. He is not quite so big as the feathered mendicant with a scarlet waistcoat, who taps at our windows for bread-crumbs during snowy weather, but his plumage is much brighter. His head and body are of a glossy velvety black, while his vest is of a vivid crimson tint. I have noticed that these birds are very fond of perching on blackened logs, and while there, they look like coals of fire. In the bushes there were numbers of wrens hopping about, chirruping in the merriest way, and many of them were even more tiny than our wrens at home. Among these was a species of tomtit, which is, I think, known by the name of the superb warbler, though I have heard shepherds call it the diamond-bird. The cock bird is very handsome, having a head and neck of the most brilliant blue, while its wings are of a rich brown colour. We soon saw plenty of parrots, mostly of the common green sort, flying in flocks of twenty or thirty at a time, and uttering a cry which sounds like "tussick-tussick." I fancy that this cry translated into English means "ware hawk," and that it is intended to warn their brethren that one of their merciless hookbeaked enemies is somewhere in the

neighbourhood. We also saw a curious bird about as big as a fieldfare, with an ash-coloured back and a whitish stomach. The peculiarity about this bird is that there are no feathers on its head, which is covered with a brown skin, drawn tight over the skull. On this account they are named "leather-heads." They are nearly as imitative as the American 'mocking-birds, and I have heard the bullock-drivers declare that they pick up the names of the bullocks in their teams, and call out over their heads in the most impudent manner, "Sailor," "Captain," "Nobbler," and so on, just as an African grey parrot in London cries "Butcher," "Shop," and all sorts of other phrases from chance passers-by. Talking of bullock-drivers, there is a small insignificant-looking bird which gives these hard-working fellows a good deal of trouble. During the night, working bullocks are apt to stray from the camp in search of more appetising pasture. For this reason bells are generally hung round their necks, so that their master may be able to trace them by the tinkling sound. But often when he hears this tinkling sound in the distance, the driver finds that there is no bullock to be seen, and that the sound has been caused by his diminutive enemy, the bell-bird. We now saw, for the first time, several white cockatoos; they usually fly in flocks of half a dozen or more, high over the trees, and utter the harshest and most discordant note of any bird in the Australian bush. Black cockatoos are more rare, and do not so often make their voices heard. Whenever they utter their cry, it is said to be a sure sign of approaching rain.

The first evening of our plunge into what Prawle was pleased to call the "wild and trackless bush" we met with a little surprise, which I cannot forbear mentioning, although almost every new-comer in Australia has been

similarly astonished. The sun was just setting, and we were busy making preparations for our nightly halt. Tom Harvey, who was rather nervous, had declared that he had seen an enormous snake in the grass. It turned out to be only the blackened and twisted limb of a fallen tree, whereupon Prawle burst into a stentorian "Ha ! ha ! ha !" A moment later he felt inclined, as the saying is, to laugh on the wrong side of his mouth, for, to his intense astonishment and to our universal bewilderment, the laugh was repeated on all sides of us. "Ha ! ha ! ha ! ho ! ho ! ho ! he ! he ! he !" and this went on for five minutes or more, as if a chorus of fiends were mocking us. Jemmy Walington tried to make us believe that it was an echo, but nobody ever heard an echo, even in Ireland, which went on for such an unconscionable length of time. Tom Harvey, who was as pale as a sheet, declared that it proceeded from a tribe of black fellows, and that we might shortly expect to be transfixed with their poisoned spears ; but Señor Robinson, who, though a stranger to the Australian bush, was accustomed to the phenomena of wild countries, presently detected the cause of our trepidation.

"See !" he exclaimed, pointing up into a tall gum-tree, with something approaching to a smile upon his grim face. "See, yonder is your echo—yonder are your black fellows."

We looked, and saw, perched upon the topmost boughs, two great birds, nearly as big as ravens, with strange comical-looking heads and long beaks. As we looked they opened their beaks, and once more the weird, unnatural laughter burst forth, which was answered by similar convulsions of merriment from half a dozen trees in the neighbourhood.

"What a donkey I am!" cried Jemmy Wallington. "Now that I see the birds, I know what they are, for I heard all about them down in Melbourne. They are a kind of gigantic kingfisher; the bushmen call them 'settlers' clocks,' because they always set up this wonderful noise at sunrise and sunset; but their common name is the 'laughing jackass.'"

"Oh! nonsense!" cried Prawle gravely, and bursting, for the first time since I had known him, into poetry—

"That bird a jackass? The notion's absurd;
He's laughing at us, like a sensible bird.

"Well," he continued, subsiding into his native prose, "I'm beginning to believe that there are some live creatures in the country besides bullocks, and sheep, and blowflies. But I'm not satisfied yet; I want to see a kangaroo, an emu, and a duck-billed platypus. Platterpurses, the ungrammatical portion of the community call them, don't they, Jemmy?"

"Yes, just as they call the tarantula spider—a horrid beast with a poisonous pair of fangs—a triantelope. Well, Prawle, I don't think you'll see many kangaroos about here. I expect they've all been hunted away by the squatters and their dogs. As for emus, we must go a good way up the country to see them, on to the great plains near the river Murray, I am told; and as for platterpurses, why they live in the water, and, barring the Yarra-Yarra, we haven't sighted a piece of water as big as an English duck-pond."

The water at the spot where we camped that evening was slightly brackish, so that our tea tasted as if some mischievous person had popped a tablespoonful of salt into the billy: in fact, we all accused Prawle of doing so; but

he stoutly denied the impeachment, and we presently found that the fault lay in the source from which we filled the kettle. About nine o'clock, just when we were thinking of rolling ourselves up in our blankets for the night, and creeping under the shelter of our tent, which a diligent use of the sail-needle had restored to a serviceable condition, I proposed to go and search for some sweeter water, so that we might enjoy a comfortable pot of tea in the morning.

"Who will come with me?" I said. "It's a lovely moonlight night."

Everybody made some excuse. The Señor was squatted close in front of the fire—he had a true negro's love of warmth—puffing away at his pipe, and all the others began yawning, and professed to be very tired.

"All right, I'll go by myself," said I; and I took up the billy.

"Don't lose your way, old boy; and mind you taste the water before you fetch it," cried Jemmy.

"If a bushranger attempts to stop you, Stephen," sang out that mischievous old Prawle, "tell him that you shall tell his mother; and if that doesn't do, say you shall give him in charge to the police. Good-bye."

Away I went, and wandered nearly a quarter of a mile, taking care to note the direction in which I was travelling. It was the first time since I landed in Australia that I had been entirely alone on a bright moonlight night, and the sensation was most exhilarating. Moonlight lends a charm to every object; even the ugliest and vulgarest buildings become picturesque under its magical influence; but the Australian bush looks especially lovely at such a time. Under the brilliant sunshine, the European misses the rich green foliage of his native country, and feels

inclined to scorn the scanty brownish-coloured clothing of the trees ; but on a moonlight night all is concealed under a coating like that of frosted silver. Moreover, I was traversing a particularly pretty tract of country, all hill and dale, and dotted over with noble forest-trees, so that I could scarcely avoid fancying that I was in some lordly park, and that presently I should see the chimneys and the glittering lights of an Elizabethan mansion peeping through the trees. It is needless to say that I saw no such mansion, but I presently discovered that of which I was in quest. At the bottom of a gently-sloping valley I saw a clear pool of water. I descended to it, tasted it, and found it perfectly sweet. But before I dip my billy into the water, I must pause to tell you of some of the sounds which I heard around me, for at night there is no lack of sounds in the Australian forest. First and foremost came the frogs, of which there appeared to be plenty in and around this water-hole. It is very curious to observe the manner in which these creatures begin their nightly entertainment. I have often watched them when camping out near a swamp or lagoon. Till about dusk they are usually quite silent ; then somebody, who is, I suppose, the leader of the orchestra, says, solemnly, “ Karack ! ” Somebody else, equally solemnly, replies, “ Kakarack,” and then the whole band of performers burst into song, as if they were executing a chorus at Exeter Hall. “ Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax ” this is the burden of their song, as old Aristophanes told us more than 2,000 years ago. Then again comes a pause, and a sort of conversation ensues. Perhaps the *patres conscripti* are discussing the affairs of the Frog-nation, settling when the next battle against the bandicoots and the kangaroo-rats shall take place ; then once more bursts out the chorus, “ Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax ; ” and so on, *da capo*, through-

out the night. Another familiar nocturnal sound is produced by the shrill screaming of the opossums, especially those of the ringtailed kind, as they chase one another among the branches of the trees. But I shall have more to say afterwards about opossums; so, for the present, will pass them by. Then I heard the monotonous cry of the Australian owl, hooting from a neighbouring thicket. He is commonly called the "more-pork," because the note which he utters resembles those words. I have heard somebody argue that this bird ought to be happy, and yet that he is never contented.

"We poor diggers," they said, "get nothing to eat day after day, but mutton, mutton, mutton; while this lucky bird feeds on pig's flesh. He could not cry for 'more pork,' unless he had ALREADY had SOME pork." But I heard another sound that was stranger than any of these. It was just as if somebody had brought a carpet into the bush, had hung it between two trees, and had then set to work diligently to bang the dust out of it. What could it be? I could not tell; so I stooped down to fill my billy with water, and remained for two or three minutes motionless, trying to catch sight of some of those talkative frogs which were chattering all around me. Suddenly I perceived a tall shadow thrown upon the water. Who could it be? A bushranger? Nonsense. It's that mischievous old Prawle, who has sneaked after me from the camp, and is now going to play me some trick. So I turned my head round, saying, "Now then, Prawle, none of your larks."

I can hardly tell you which was the most astonished, I or the figure that stood behind me. For it was not Prawle, nor any of my mates, nor, indeed, a human being at all, but a gigantic kangaroo, who was standing so close to me that I could have touched her. She had such a gentle,

soft-looking face that I made up my mind she was a lady. I saw her, however, only for a moment, for directly she perceived that I was not her husband, or her sweetheart, or her cousin, but one of those cruel white-skinned, tailless creatures who encourage ferocious dogs to tear the flesh of her gentle kindred, she uttered a cry of terror, banged her tail on the ground with a tremendous flop, and then leapt away in a series of such prodigious strides that she was over the hill-side, and out of sight, before I could say Señor Gonzales Robinson. I now began to understand the carpet-beating sound. It was caused by the kangaroos striking their tails upon the ground as a signal to each other. I could not help feeling pleased that I had seen this remarkable sight, and that old Prawle, being too lazy to come out, had missed it. But, indeed, if Prawle had come out with me, we should probably have both missed it, for we should have been sure to have got chatting together, and then that lovely kangaroo, for whom to this day I entertain a tender regard, would not have done me the compliment to mistake me for one of her relations. I afterwards consulted an experienced colonist about this kangaroo, and when he heard that it was nearly six feet high, he pronounced it to be a "boomer," or "old man," one of the largest existing species. Kangaroos, if caught young, are easily tamed, and become very affectionate. I remember one day going into a shepherd's hut to beg for a drink of water. The shepherd chanced to be a married man, and his wife offered to give me something better than water; namely, a drink of milk. She went across the yard to fetch it from an outhouse, and, to my surprise, three great kangaroos instantly leapt out and followed her. She told me they insisted upon going wherever she went. But, as is well known, animals attach themselves especially to some persons. I knew a man who

had a small farm in an Australian village, and used to eke out his income by going about the country buying sheepskins. He declared that he never showed any particular kindness to his domestic animals, and yet, when he started to go out, his wife told me that he would often be followed, for a quarter of a mile or more, by a pig, a cat, a goat, and a hen; the fun of the thing being, that he was often quite unconscious of the motley cavalcade which was following his footsteps, and would, if he saw them, drive them angrily away.

Of course, when I got back to our tent, with my billy full of water in my hand, I related my adventure. Nobody seemed inclined to believe it. Tom Harvey rudely pronounced it to be a "whacker;" and old Prawle rather offended me by holding up his hands in mock astonishment, and saying, as the little girls in the streets do, "Oh, you story!" However, in the morning, before breakfast, I insisted on his going with me to the water-hole, and I asked Señor Robinson to join us. I triumphantly pointed out the prints of the kangaroo's footsteps alongside of my own in the soft mud of the bank; and though, as the worthy Señor had never seen a kangaroo, he could not say to what animal these tracks belonged, he materially assisted my cause by declaring that they were the foot-tracks of a creature bearing some resemblance to an immense hare. So much for my little adventure, which was presently succeeded by an incident of far deeper interest, which drove all thoughts of kangaroos out of our heads.

The sun had nearly attained its full height, the heat was growing oppressive, and our cattle were beginning to show signs of weariness. Señor Gonzales Robinson gave notice that at the next convenient resting-place we would make a halt. We were now traversing an undulating region,

timbered with fine trees, but still of such an open character that we could easily have driven a gig over it without meeting any serious obstacle. Just as we had surmounted the brow of a hill, if I may give the name of hill to such gradual ascents as these were, Señor Robinson paused, and uttered a low sound like the "hugh" of an Indian scout. Pointing his finger into the valley before us, an unexpected sight met our eyes. We saw a party of men, five in number; two of them were apparently engaged in digging a hole, the other three were standing round it. Several horses were grazing near at hand, and the smoke of a small fire was curling into the air.

"I know what they're doing," said Lively Jemmy, confidently. "They're prospecting—searching for a gold-field. Let us try our luck too."

"They won't care to have us too near them," observed Tom Harvey, rather nervously. "My advice is to give them a wide berth."

"What do you say, Señor?" asked Prawle.

"They are all armed," replied the Mexican, shading his eyes with his hand as he spoke, and then mechanically handling his own weapons. "Five men to four boys and one man. The odds are not fair."

"I say, Señor," cried Prawle, good-humouredly, "you mustn't insult us by calling us boys. I don't mind it, because I'm pretty big, but it hurts the feelings of a little chap like this," he added, laying his hand on my shoulder.

"Why should we take into our heads that they must be enemies?" I asked. "They are most likely harmless diggers like ourselves."

"Young gentleman," replied the Mexican, gravely, "in a country like this I take every man for an enemy until I prove him to be a friend."

"Oh, dear me!" said Prawle; "that's a very uncomfortable view of human nature. As long as people are civil to me I'm civil to them." Come, let us go boldly up to them, and ask them what their prospects are like."

"Hear, hear!" cried Jemmy; and I said "Hear, hear!" also.

"What do you say, Tom?" asked Jemmy.

"Oh, I'm ready to do anything you like," replied Tom Harvey, valorously; but, though his words were brave, his face wore an anxious expression.

"And you, Señor?" asked Prawle.

"It looks ill to show fear," he replied. "We have as much right in the bush as they have. We will go up to them and ask them the news."

While we had been holding this council it was evident that the five strangers, having perceived us, had been engaged in a similar palaver. The two who had been digging had climbed out of the pit, and the whole five were now standing in a circle. By the time we had approached within speaking distance they broke up their consultation, and the two diggers recommenced their work. I had hitherto only heard vague descriptions of the manner in which gold-digging was conducted, and was therefore especially anxious to witness the process. The pit which the men were excavating appeared about six feet long and about two feet wide: near it lay something which looked like a heap of clothing. Conversation now began between us.

"Good morning, mates!" sang out Señor Robinson, assuming a tone of careless unconcern.

"Morning!" answered cheerfully a tall black-bearded man in a scarlet blouse.

"Any signs of the yellow metal?" asked Prawle, endeavouring to be jocose.

"I can't say at present," replied the other; "we haven't gone deep enough."

"Are gold-diggers' shafts always made this shape?" demanded Jemmy, as he peered into the hole.

"It makes me shudder," muttered Tom Harvey. "It reminds me of a churchyard."

At this moment I heard two of the men talking in low tones together. One of them said, in reply to the other, "What does it signify? They're a parcel of boys and new chums."

Directly after this the man in the scarlet ~~shirt~~, who appeared to be the leader of the party, uttered a low and peculiar whistle. Instantly two of the others drew alongside of Señor Robinson, each pointing a pistol at his head, and peremptorily bade him hold up his hands, on pain of instant death.

"Mind!" shouted the leader, as he perceived the Señor's hands wandering towards his weapons, "I see you're a new chum, and don't understand the ways of this country. This is what we call 'bailing up.' Hold up your hands, and not a hair of your head shall be touched. Refuse to hold them up, and these boys here shall ascertain from practical observation whether their commander-in-chief has got any brains or not. Do you hear me, sir?" he added fiercely. "Hold up your hands at once."

"I yield," replied the Mexican haughtily, "because I can't help myself."

"No, of course ye can't, ye fool," replied one of his captors brutally. "But we can help ourselves." And as he spoke he drew Señor Robinson's cherished pistols from his belt.

"Terrible old-fashioned tools, captain," he observed; as he handed them to his leader. "Made in the year one, I

should fancy, in the days of Jerry Abershaw, or some of them Hounslow Heath coves."

"Yes, they're not good for much," answered the captain, as he quietly stuck them into his own belt. "And now, young gentlemen," he added, turning to us, with an air of easy politeness, "I suppose you've none of these dangerous weapons in your possession?"

"I've nothing of the kind, captain, upon my honour," said Prawle.

"Nor I," repeated each of us in succession.

"Shall we search 'em, or take their word for it, captain?" asked a broad-shouldered, red-bearded fellow, with a patch over one of his eyes.

The captain examined each of our faces attentively for several seconds.

"Take their word for it," he replied. "And, now then, my lads," he said, addressing us, and assuming a tone of frank good humour, "I want you to answer me a few questions. How long have you been in the colony? what diggings are you bound for? and how came you so far off the main line of road?"

Señor Robinson still remained rather sulky, but the rest of us, judging that it was better, as we were unable to help ourselves, to reply with a good grace, answered readily all the questions we were asked.

"Good," said the captain. "You boys have set an excellent example to this sullen little nigger here, whom I have a great mind to punish for his obstinacy."

Señor Robinson's brown cheeks reddened with rage on hearing these opprobrious words. He ground his teeth and stamped his foot, but he dared not lower his hands, for the muzzles of the merciless revolvers were still held close to his temples.

"You have told me your story openly, and without reserve," continued the captain; "and now I will speak without reserve in return. Weren't you surprised at being stopped upon your journey in this forcible manner?" he continued, turning to Prawle, and indicating the captive, Gonzales Robinson.

"Not at all," answered Prawle. "We were told to expect this sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"Why we heard that in the Black Forest there were plenty of Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon, as Mr. Shakespeare calls them."

"You don't mean to say," cried the captain with an air of astonishment, "that you took us for bush-rangers?"

"I did, indeed," said Prawle quite seriously.

All the troop burst into a laugh at these words, "Well, that is a good 'un." "Did ever you hear the like?" and so forth.

"No, no, young man," said the captain, gravely, "we are persons of good character, like yourselves."

"I'm delighted to hear it, sir," replied the imperturbable Prawle.

"And now I will tell you why I have detained you. We wished you to be present at a very solemn ceremony. We are not digging for gold. That young man, yonder," indicating Tom Harvey, "was right when he spoke about a churchyard. We are digging a grave in which to bury one of our mates, who died this morning. Uncover the face of the corpse, Dick."

As he spoke these words, one of the party stepped forward to the heap of clothes, which I had observed lying on the ground, and disclosed the fixed and rigid features of a

dead body, decently dressed in a blue serge shirt and white trousers.

I had never before been brought face to face with death, and I felt terribly startled. Besides, the scene was enough to strike any one with awe. The solemn silent forest—for during the heat of the day all the birds' voices are hushed—the group of armed men, with their picturesque dresses and lawless faces, and the stiff stark carcase of that which had once been a man, made a deep impression on me. I could perceive that all my youthful companions were similarly affected; even Prawle's face grew a shade less ruddy than usual. As for the Señor, he remained stern and immovable; but he darted a swift glance of intelligence at us, as though he could say something important if he chose to do so.

"Captain, the grave is ready," said one of the diggers, as he leant on his pickaxe.

"Very well. Bear a hand to lower our poor friend Tiger into it."

"He looks quite a strong young fellow," said Prawle to me, in a half-whisper; "I wonder what he died of."

"He died," answered the captain, in a deep, stern voice, "of an overdose of lead. You are aware that lead, taken in excess, is a deadly poison?"

"Any burial service, captain?" asked one of the men who was guarding Señor Robinson.

"No," he answered gravely. "I don't meddle with such matters. ~~But~~ by your leave, mates, I'll say a few words about the deceased before we shovel the earth on to his breast:—We all knew the deceased as Tiger, mates, not because of his ferocious disposition, for he was an amiable creature, but because when he first joined our company he wore a yellow waistcoat with black stripes. Our friend

Tigef, mates, was always to the fore, a courageous and industrious workman. He had a wonderful nose for scenting out the smell of gold. He lost his life in the path of duty. He felt sure that there was gold in a certain pocket—a deposit of gold," he continued, turning to us, in an explanatory tone, "is technically called a pocket—he felt sure that there was gold, I say, in a certain pocket; and in endeavouring to ascertain the fact he swallowed the poisonous dose of lead which brought him to his present horizontal position. 'Tiger, old boy,' said the captain, addressing the unconscious corpse, "good-bye to you."

All the others said "good-bye" also, and the two spade-men were on the point of shovelling the earth into the grave, when the sound of horse's hoofs was heard, and a horseman, wearing a bright blue blouse, with a green veil round his hat, and a pair of jack-boots on his legs, galloped in hot haste into the camp.

"I say, captain," he cried, "I've great news." He then stopped short, and eyed us suspiciously. "Who are these fellows?" he asked.

"Square coves,"* was the reply. "But you needn't mind them. Tell us the news."

"There's a thousand ounces coming down the road. Nine in party. They've all got bulldogs,† and mean to use 'em. Still, the job may be done by careful scheming."

Hereupon an earnest whispered conversation ensued.

"Are you all agreeable, mates?" demanded the captain, addressing his companions.

"Of course we are, we're always agreeable," they replied.

"Then," said the messenger, "there's not a moment to

* *I.e.* honest men.

† Pistols.

be lost, or they'll reach the plains before we can come up with them."

"Mates," cried the captain, "you hear what our friend the Dandy says. You must catch your horses at once, and be 'off. Never mind that cursed little nigger any longer."

Señor Gonzales's eyes flashed fire at this repeated insult.

"I suppose we may turn out his pockets," said one of his guards.

"Turn out anything you please, only look sharp."

Accordingly, to Señor Gonzales Robinson's intense disgust and mortification, his pockets were searched, and three one-pound notes, besides some loose silver and a snuff-box, were discovered and appropriated by his captors.

"Now for the young 'uns," pursued the scoundrels, and one of them unceremoniously seized Tom Harvey by the collar.

"No," shouted the captain in a commanding voice; "I won't allow it. Let the boys alone. Be content with the prize in prospect, you greedy rascals, and be off to saddle your horses. Young gentlemen," he said, turning to us with an air of the utmost urbanity, "will you do me a favour? I shouldn't like to think that my friend Tiger's eyes had been picked out by the hawks, or that his flesh had been nibbled by the native cats; so will you have the kindness to fill up his grave as soon as we are gone? We are essentially business-men, and business summons us away. This gentleman," indicating the messenger, "has just brought us news of the discovery of a new gold-field. If we find it a profitable place we will send you our address." And with this extremely polite farewell oration the captain rode off to hurry on the preparations of his men.

They were evidently accustomed to this sort of hasty

summons, for before five minutes had elapsed they were all in their saddles, with the exception of one unfortunate fellow, who was unable to catch his horse. I could not help being amused as I watched him. He had put some oats in a tin dish, and went sidling up to the animal, who stretched out his neck willingly enough to take the oats, but as soon as his would-be rider endeavoured to throw the halter over his neck, he threw up his head scornfully, kicked out his heels, and galloped coquettishly away. The colour of the horse—he was a bright chestnut—and the oats which were offered him as a bribe put me in mind of our lost Titicaca.

“He looks rather like Titicaca,” said I, doubtfully.

“It is Titicaca,” whispered the Mexican in reply, in a voice of concentrated spite. He had evidently recognized his lost steed as soon as he caught sight of him.

“Now then,” shouted the captain, “we’re all waiting for that lubberly fellow Dick Potter. Can’t you manage to catch your horse, Dick?”

“No, that I can’t,” answered honest Dick, as he wiped his forehead, which was streaming with perspiration.

“Shall I try to catch him for you, sir?” said Señor Gonzales Robinson, addressing the captain in a tone of singular humility; “I am a Mexican, and accustomed to horses. Yonder hangs my lasso,” he said, pointing to Topsy’s pack-saddle.

“Ay, do, my friend,” answered the captain, “for we’re losing most valuable time. And hark ye, you two petty pilferers, Nat the Weaver and Barney Callaghan, hand over the contents of the Señor’s pockets to Dick Potter. Dick, as soon as the Señor catches your horse for you, give him back his money, d’ye hear?”

The two rascals who had been guarding Señor Robinson

delivered over their spoil to their comrade with extreme unwillingness.

"Mind," said the captain, addressing Dick, "I'll have no cheating. Pay the man his money as soon as he gives you your horse. Honour bright!"

"Honour bright," replied Dick.

"And now, then, we'll be off. You must ride hard after us, Dick, and catch us up. Away!"

At this signal the captain, attended by his messenger and his three followers, cantered swiftly away, and were soon hidden from view by the undulating ground.

I felt sure there was mischief lurking in the Mexican's eye, but I had no idea what he intended to do. We were all unarmed, while a brace of revolvers gleamed in Dick Potter's belt.

"Now, Mr. Potter," said the Mexican with great politeness, "if you will hold out the dish with the oats, I will secure your horse for you."

"No," answered Potter suspiciously, as he handled his pistols; "let one of your boys take the oats. I'll look on."

"Good, that will do just as well," said Señor Robinson carelessly. "Scudamore, you hold the oats."

And he advanced cautiously, lasso in hand.

Señor Gonzales Robinson stood with his lasso poised in his hand, preparing to fling it over Titicaca's head, while I advanced cautiously towards the wary animal, and tried to inveigle him by holding the tin dish of oats under his nose. My three comrades were engaged in watching our other horses, lest Titicaca's gambols should perchance induce them to make a bolt, while Mr. Richard Potter, who was supposed to be the owner of the horse we were trying to catch, stood aloof, surveying the operations with a keen eye.

and with a hand ready in case of need to grasp one of his revolvers.

Now, before I go on to tell you what happened, I must say a few words regarding the strange scenes of which I had been a witness during the last hour. I had had no opportunity of comparing notes with my companions, but I came to the conclusion that these self-styled diggers were a set of scoundrels. The captain of the band was as polite as if he had been accustomed to Belgravian drawing-rooms—I afterwards heard that he had,—but nevertheless I judged him to be a lawless fellow, and that in reality he had been summoned away for the purpose of committing some robbery of an unusually important character. These men had appropriated Titicaca without scruple, but horse-stealing was such a common offence at that period in Australia that I did not think much worse of them for what they had done. But Titicaca's loss reminded me of the strange discovery which Señor Gonzales Robinson had made in the extinguished embers of that bush-fire. Was there any connection between the blood-stained fragment of linen which he found there, and the death of the man called Tiger, to whose funeral oration we had just been listening? Undoubtedly there was a very close connection.

Some readers may think that we youngsters showed little courage in allowing our commanding officer to be plundered while we stood tamely by. But what could we have done? We were entirely without weapons, while the enemy were armed to the teeth. If we had raised a finger to attempt a rescue, Señor Robinson's brains would infallibly have been blown out at the first onset.

Please now to observe the various positions occupied by the four personages who played the chief part in the little drama which I am about to describe. Titicaca's fears had

subsided, he had allowed me to come up close to him, he had begun to nibble the oats, he had suffered me to stroke his neck, and in another minute I could have seized him by the mane. Señor Gonzales Robinson, with his lasso coiled ready for a throw, placed himself at a distance of about five-and-twenty paces, facing Titicaca, and with his back to Mr. Potter, who stood at about the same distance further behind. Suddenly Señor Gonzales raised his arm above his head, and at the same moment revolved swiftly on his heel. He cast his lasso, but it did not fall upon the neck of our runaway steed. For once in his life the unerring marksman had strangely missed his aim, the lasso flew in the opposite direction, and fell over the astonished shoulders of Mr. Richard Potter.

“Look out!” cried Prawle, “he is going to fire!”

But Mr. Potter was not quick enough. Before he could disengage his revolver from the belt, the Mexican, by a vigorous jerk, had thrown him upon the ground, and then pulled the slip-knot with such merciless vigour that the captive's face began to grow black, and his eyes seemed ready to start out of his head.

“You will kill him, Señor!” I exclaimed.

“Not yet,” answered the Mexican, with a revengeful gleam in his eyes. “Come here, two of you, and help me to bind his arms and legs. Meantime, keep a bright lookout, you others, lest the rest of the gang should return and surprise us.”

As soon as Mr. Potter's limbs were made fast, the Señor, with a chuckle of satisfaction, transferred his prisoner's revolvers to his own belt, besides emptying his pockets, and regaining possession of his three one-pound notes. His snuff-box and loose silver had been carried away by Nat the Weaver and Barney Callaghan, who had taken care

not to interpret their commanding officer's orders too literally.

Titicaca had darted away with a convulsive spring on seeing the dreaded lasso flying through the air, but as soon as he perceived that it had not come near him, but had, instead, enclosed a two-legged animal, he paused, and then, neighing in a friendly manner as a token of recognition to his former friends, Topsy, Lucy, and Gamboge, advanced towards them. The result was that, before he was able to escape, Prawle had seized him by the mane, flung himself on his back, and knotted his long legs under his belly in lieu of girth. Having then galloped him up and down for a few minutes, until he had cured his fidgetiness, Prawle dismounted carefully, and proceeded to place Mr. Potter's saddle on Titicaca's back, and Mr. Potter's bridle over his head.

"Upon my word, Titty," observed Prawle, when he had accomplished this operation, "you really look like a gentleman's horse now. If I were only a little more elegantly dressed, I should have no objection to displaying myself on your back in Hyde Park."

Jemmy Wallington was a good-hearted fellow, and could not bear to see even a bushranger suffering. His hand had been the first to slacken the suffocating pressure of the slip-knot, and then he opened his stores and poured a liberal dose of brandy down our captive's throat. The alcohol revived Mr. Potter's spirits, and his complexion regained its original sunburnt tint. He opened his mouth and began to speak; and, though he was bound hand and foot, and at the mercy of the revengeful little Mexican, he spoke with perfect calmness and self-possession.

"I want to know what's the meaning of all this tomfoolery?" he demanded, addressing himself to Señor

Robinson, and garnishing his speech with a plentiful sprinkling of forcible adjectives. "What have I done, that you should first hang me like a dog, and then truss me like a fowl?"

"You called me a cursed nigger," answered Señor Robinson bitterly. "You stole my horse. Prepare for death. It is good to rid the world of such villains as you. Yonder is a grave ready dug. There is room for your carcase on top of your friend Tiger. I give you the space of time while I count a thousand." And with these alarming words the Mexican retired a few paces from his prisoner, and began muttering to himself, "One, two, three, four, &c.," in his native language.

To this day I do not feel sure whether the savage little man was speaking in grim jest or bitter earnest, but I know that we all uttered an exclamation of horror at his blood-thirsty language.

Jemmy Wallington did more. We were quite surprised to see that slightly-built, girlish-looking young fellow, whom nobody thought to be gifted with too much courage—to see him walk up to the Mexican, and looking him straight in the face, speak thus:—

"Señor, in all matters of discipline I promised to obey you, and I will obey you cheerfully. But we are Englishmen, and we don't like even to hear people talk of putting other people to death in cold blood. If you mean what you say, we won't allow it; if you don't mean what you say, where is the use of uttering empty threats?"

"Bravo! Jemmy," cried every one of us spontaneously.

There was a tigerish gleam in the Mexican's eye; he was armed, and we were defenceless; nevertheless moral force prevailed, and he answered, as if rather ashamed of himself, "I just wanted to frighten the fellow."

"I don't know what I've done to hurt you, Mr. Senior," expostulated the captive. "It wasn't I that called you a cursed nigger, it was Captain Maconochie. I didn't prig your money, it was Nat and Barney."

"You stole my horse," urged Señor Gonzales.

"You mean that chestnut there that the long-legged young fellow is riding? I don't know that he is your horse, Mr. Senior. I know that he strayed into our camp, and that we meant to take care of him till we could find his rightful owner."

"I am the rightful owner," cried Señor Gonzales.

"Where's your receipt from the last seller?"

Señor Gonzales searched his pockets, but could not find it.

"Your scoundrelly friends have stolen it," he cried passionately.

"I know nothing of that," answered Mr. Potter coolly.

"And now what are you going to do with me?"

"It would serve you right to tie you to one of these trees, and leave you there to die of hunger and thirst," exclaimed the Mexican.

"I say, I say, Señor," cried Prawle, "don't make a fool of yourself. Stow that kind of talk. Don't brag of doing what you don't dare to do."

"Young gentleman," shouted the little foreigner, furious with passion, "you are going too far. Do not venture to provoke me." He significantly touched one of his pistols.

"Who says that I'm going too far?" cried Prawle.

"None of us," we all exclaimed. "Bravo! Prawle. Prawle for ever!"

"Come, Señor," said Prawle, "don't let's have a row, especially over a worthless vagabond like this prisoner of ours. We've been excellent friends hitherto. Shake hands."

“Let us fill up Tiger’s grave, and be off as soon as possible.”

Señor Robinson was evidently intimidated by the bold front we had shown. I make great allowance for him. I believe he meant well; but he did not understand an Englishman’s love of justice and fair play. He extended his brawny brown fist, held it out to Prawle, and then to each of us in succession. Our good-fellowship was completely re-established.

“And now, gentlemen, that you’ve settled your own differences, what do you mean to do with me?” asked the prisoner.

“We shall hand you over to the police, as soon as we can find a police-barrack,” answered Prawle.

“The nearest police-barracks,” observed Mr. Potter in a tone of the utmost unconcern, as if he had been a stranger to whom we had applied for information—“the nearest police-barracks are fifteen miles from here, at Carambong Creek, over yonder,” nodding with his head, as his hands were tied. “As you are bound for Bendigo, it won’t be much out of your road to take me there, and it’ll be a convenience to me if you will do so.”

“I say, Mr. Potter,” asked Prawle drily, “do you see any green in my eye?”

“Yes, Mr. Prawle, I see a good deal,” answered the prisoner, calmly. At this reply we all burst out laughing.

“Do you suppose we believe in the existence of your wonderful police-barracks at Carambong Creek?” asked Prawle.

“Whether you believe in them or not doesn’t signify a straw,” replied Mr. Potter. “The barracks are there. If you don’t find the barracks where I say they are, I give

you leave to tie me up, and let me have three dozen on the bare back."

"We could accommodate you in that respect, Mr. Potter, without asking your permission," answered Prawle.

"Now, gentlemen," said the prisoner solemnly, "I am going to make a last appeal. You had much better let me go. You mistake me altogether. I am an innocent man."

We could not help laughing at his cool impudence.

"What is more, I am a secret agent of the police."

"Ha! ha! ha!" we all shouted in reply.

"I swear by all that is sacred that I was on the point of securing that gang of bushrangers when you interfered with me."

"Bah?" cried the Mexican, in intense disgust, as he bent over his prisoner, and looked hard in his face. "Bah! you are a liar and a perjurer, as well as a thief. If the police pronounce you innocent, I also swear by all that is sacred that I will swallow this lasso!"

Before filling up Tiger's grave, Señor Gonzales stooped down and uncovered the dead man's breast. As he had anticipated, he found there a small wound, evidently made by a bullet.

"Are you a murderer as well as a perjurer?" he said, addressing the prisoner. "How came this man by his death?"

"Didn't you hear Captain Maconochie say how?" answered Mr. Potter, rather gruffly. "The Tiger swallowed more lead than was good for his constitution."

"You mean that he was shot?" said Tom Harvey.

"Yes, he was shot."

"By his own mates?" asked Prawle.

"Do you suppose they'd murder him, and then make a speech over his grave? Not exactly. Tiger was shot, as

the captain told you, in the execution of his duty. It was his duty, as one of the firm, to ask any likely parties whom he happened to meet on the road how much gold they had about them. A storekeeper whom he addressed in this manner thought the question impertinent, and answered him out of the barrel of his revolver. Tiger was of a nervous constitution, he dropped with astonishment at such a rude reply; some other members of the firm picked him up, and nursed him for three days at that place where you say you lost your chestnut horse. They then brought him on here; and here, as you perceive, he croaked."*

"Do you mean to say that you are not a partner in Captain Maconochie's firm?" asked Prawle.

"I am a professed partner—not a real one. I am an honest man in the employ of the police, and I warn you that you had better let me go."

"We will let you go—into a prison, nowhere else," answered Señor Robinson.

By the time this conversation was concluded, the grave had been filled up, and we started on our journey towards the Carambong Creek, for Mr. Potter was so persistent in assuring us that there was a police station there that we felt bound to believe him. As we did not care to carry him on horseback, we unloosed the cords which bound his legs, still keeping his arms partially pinioned, and marched him between us. Señor Gonzales was less inclined to trust Mr. Potter than we were; he persisted in believing that his prisoner was endeavouring to lead him into a trap, and he warned him that any attempt at a rescue on the part of his mates would be followed by his instant death. It did, indeed, seem highly ludicrous that we should be indebted to our prisoner for directions as to the locality of his in-

* *i.e.* died.

tended dungeon, but we were totally ignorant of the country, and, being away from the ordinary track of travellers, could find nobody to whom we might apply for information.

We made a forced march, pushed our pack-horses forward, and reached the Carambong Creek soon after sunset. We had now crossed the Black Forest in a diagonal direction, and had reached the northern slope of the Dividing Range, where every drop of rain that falls flows inland, and ultimately, if not sucked up by the scorching sun, swells the volume of water in the Great Murray River. Carambong, which is marked in the official survey maps as the township of Belvidere, was a place of uninviting aspect. It consisted apparently of two public-houses, two butchers' shops, a blacksmith's, a baker's, a general store, and the police barracks, which latter appeared extensive enough for a place fifty times as big. But it seemed the Carambong was the central police *rendezvous* for a large rural district. So far Mr. Richard Potter had evidently not humbugged us. By the time we got into the village—if such a pretty name as village can be applied to a miserable hole like Belvidere—it was getting dark, for we had spent half an hour or more in fording the waters of the Carambong, which were swelled by the late heavy rains. Consequently the few inhabitants who were stirring abroad paid no attention to us, for it was too dark to perceive Mr. Potter's pinioned arms, and that was the only feature about our cavalcade which was likely to excite any curiosity.

Señor Gonzales Robinson, bidding us guard the prisoner safely, marched in advance of us into the Courtyard of the barracks, swelling with importance at the news which he had to communicate. Three troopers were lounging in the yard, reclining on a prostrate log of wood and smoking their evening pipes.

"Gentlemen," said the Mexican, pulling off his broad-leaved hat, and making a ceremonious Spanish bow—a performance which, I am sorry to say, Prawle instantly imitated, to our intense amusement, behind his back—"gentlemen, I have secured an important prisoner—a member of Captain Maconochie's gang."

"Maconochie's gang!" exclaimed a handsome young Irishman, as he lazily blew out a wreath of fragrant smoke. "Bedad! that's good news, if it's true. A bigger set of spalpeens niver set foot in Port Phillip than Maconochie's gang."

Señor Robinson looked on us with an eye of triumph, as much as to say, "Didn't I tell you so?"

"What's his name?" asked another trooper.

"Here he is to answer for himself," replied Señor Robinson, shoving his captive, as he spoke, into the presence of the police.

"Why it's Potter!" exclaimed the police in accents of unfeigned astonishment.

"Potter," said one of them sternly, "I hope you haven't been playing your old game, pretending to work for us, and then doing business on your own account. How came you in such a fix as this?"

"So help me Billy, gentlemen," answered Mr. Potter earnestly, "I'm as true as steel. It's all this meddling fellow's doings," pointing to Señor Robinson. He then told the story of his capture.

"Hang it, man," cried the Irish constable, "why didn't you tell 'em you were working for us?"

"So I did, Mr. Delany; I swore the solidest oaths I could think of that I was an agent of the police, and they wouldn't believe me."

"What a pity it is that Potter looks such a rogue!" observed another constable.

- "I can't help that, gentlemen. I am what Heaven has made me."

"Don't lay the blame of that red nose and those watery eyes on Heaven, Mr. Potter," remarked the chief constable. "And now, my man," he said, knitting his brows, and addressing himself to Señor Gonzales Robinson, "you've placed us in an awkward position through your officiousness. For private reasons, Mr. Potter is giving up his connection with the highway business, and we had made a bargain with him that he should ride over and give us information as to where the firm, with which he has been lately connected, would be at a certain hour this afternoon. We should have bagged the whole lot, we should have taken Maconochie, the cleverest bushranger in Victoria, who has two hundred pounds reward set upon his head; and now we have lost the chance all through you—you abominable little meddling nigger."

Señor Gonzales reddened with rage, and drew a pistol. "Sir," he replied, in a voice tremulous with anger and disappointment, "I am a Mexican, and a gentleman. I demand instant satisfaction, or——"





CHAPTER X.

The Pistol-shot—Death of a beloved namesake—News of Maconochie's Gang—To horse and away!—The Female Blacksmith—Prawle as an Auctioneer—Singular Accident near the Wombat Inn—Norah, the kind-hearted Servant-maid—An old hand claims acquaintance—Sleeping till Sunset—The Duckbilled Platypus—Captain Spanswick's Excitement—Captain Spanswick Lectures the Señor—The Captain's Magnanimity—Prawle winks his Eye—A Dissolution of Partnership—Appearance of the Bendigo Diggings—Iron Bark Gully—Mr. Skilbeck and his Dog Muzzler—I behold a frightful Apparition—The Art and Mystery of Gold-mining—Sam Skilbeck's Advice—Sundry Employments—Jemmy Wallington's Dampers—Finding a Nugget—Prawle's Tumble—Anecdotes about Flies—Skilbeck's good-natured Proposal—I become Assistant to a Storekeeper—Prawle converts himself into an Advertising Medium—My Experiences as Tom Prince's Shopman—Prawle's Wonderful Invention—How to filter Muddy Water—Guy Fawkes' Day on the Diggings.

DO you dare to threaten us with your pistol?" exclaimed the Irish trooper. As he spoke, he fearlessly threw himself, though unarmed, on the enraged little foreigner and seized his wrist. The pistol exploded in the struggle, and the bullet, after passing within eighteen inches of Tom Harvey's heart, buried itself in the body of my unfortunate white mare. Poor

Lucy, my dear sister's namesake, uttered a groan, staggered, fell, and after a few convulsive struggles, expired. Two minutes afterwards our late commander was securely handcuffed, while Mr. Richard Potter was set at liberty.

The tables are turned, eh?" observed the latter, with a malicious glance at the Mexican. "Now, gentlemen," he continued, addressing himself to the constables, "I don't want to take any man's character away, especially when he is down upon his luck; but I'm afraid, in point of villainy, there isn't a pin to choose between this little chap in the green jumper and Maconochie. I believe he has come over from Niggerland expressly to live by what he can pick up on the road."

"Nonsense!" cried Prawle. "I hope, gentlemen, you are not going to believe this fellow, who has gallows-bird written on his countenance; and a big R for rogue, I'll warrant, printed on his skin, if you look under his shirt."

The constables smiled at Prawle's remarks.

"I'll forgive what you've just said, Mr. Prawle," replied Potter, "because you saved my life from this bloodthirsty little darky. But before you abuse me, listen to evidence. Do these revolvers belong to the Mexican?"

"No," said the chief constable; "they were supplied by us to you. Here is the Government brand upon them."

"The revolvers were taken in self-defence," I cried.

"Were my three one-pound notes taken in self-defence, young whipper-snapper?" demanded Mr. Potter. "You'll find them in the prisoner's pockets, Mr. Delany,—numbers 25142, forty-three, and forty-four."

"You're right,—here they are," said the Irishman, as he turned out Señor Gonzales' pockets.

"They are my notes," rejoined the Mexican; "I got them at the Melbourne Bank."

"Lastly, gentlemen," continued Mr. Potter, "he has stolen that chestnut horse which strolled into our camp the other day, and which I was taking care of till I could find the rightful owner."

"I bought that horse at the bazaar in Great Bourke Street," cried Señor Robinson.

"Allow me to say a word," interposed the chief constable. "You're a useful fellow, Potter, but your character isn't altogether stainless. As for this man, I know nothing against his honesty, but I know that just now he nearly blew out Sergeant Delany's brains. I shall impound both horse and money for further evidence."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a mounted trooper galloped into the yard. His horse was covered with sweat and mud: he had evidently ridden hard. He dismounted, and at once entered into an animated conversation with the other three constables. We heard such scraps of talk as the following:—

"You are sure it was them?"—"Sure, but I could do nothing alone against such a number."—"A thousand ounces! That will be worth recovering."—"Woolpack Inn, and travelling due east over Henderson's Run, eh?"—"Here, Potter, I want to say a word to you."

Presently afterwards we heard Potter say, "I believe, gentlemen, I can put you on their track."

"Very well; then you must mount the chestnut. This horse, my lads," he said, addressing us, "must be taken for the service of the Crown. If you can hereafter prove your title to it, it shall be returned to you. Release the foreigner from his handcuffs; we've no time to waste over such trifles. Get your horses and arms ready at once.

Within ten minutes from that time, the constables, who had been reinforced to the number of ten, rode away

in the moonlight, leaving us in charge of some of their comrades, who, having been in the saddle all day, had retired to rest, but were now aroused by this unexpected summons.

"Well, it's an unlucky business," they observed, when they had heard our story; "only two horses left out of five—one suffocated in a gully, one shot, and one carried off by our mates. New chums had better not bother themselves with horses."

These constables treated us very civilly. They gave us something to eat, they showed us a convenient camping-ground, and assisted us to drag away the white mare's carcase. With their help, we dug a pit, and tumbled poor Lucy in, so that her remains might not taint the fresh air of Belvidere. Next day we held a council of war; and, as we had only two horses left, we determined to sell them and the bulk of our stores by public auction to the inhabitants of Belvidere. One misfortune following upon another seemed to have deprived Señor Robinson of all his energy, so the management of the sale was entrusted to Prawle.

"I wonder," remarked Jemmy Wallington, as we sat chatting that morning after breakfast, "whether the Señor means to exhibit that feat which he promised us."

"What feat?"

"The swallowing of his lasso. Our prisoner was certainly regarded by the police as an innocent man, and was set at liberty by them."

"You call that wretch an innocent man!" exclaimed the Mexican, who had come behind us unperceived. "Why, he is the worst of the whole gang. They are robbers, and murderers, too, I doubt not, upon occasion; but this Potter is a blacker villain than any of them, seeing

that he will sell his comrades' blood for money. His innocence must be proved more clearly than it is proved at present, before I swallow my lasso. How I wish," added Señor Gonzales bitterly, "that, instead of listening to you soft-hearted young gentlemen, I had blown his brains out! I should have rid the colony of a scoundrel, and I should have saved our best horse. I fear we shall never see Titicaca again."

Belvidere was not on the main line of route to the diggings, and was rather a sleepy sort of place. It had arisen during the old primitive days of the colony, when gold-mining was unknown, and when flocks and herds constituted the sole wealth of the country. Besides, many of the male inhabitants had gone to the diggings, leaving their premises in charge of their wives and other female connections. Glancing into the blacksmith's shop, I saw a buxom lady presiding at the anvil. She wore her husband's apron, her arms were bared, showing a fine muscular development, and she was instructing a miserable little undersized pale-faced fellow in the art of making horse-shoe nails.

When I related this anecdote to Prawle, he at once said that Mrs. Skilbeck must be a woman worth knowing, and that he would try and make her acquaintance. So he went with me to the forge, and, having patiently waited until she had finished the job which she had on hand, namely, the shoeing of a drayhorse, he introduced himself to her, and told the story of our various mishaps in such a straightforward, and yet in such a comical manner, that she laughed until she was ready to cry, yet could not help pitying us. Mrs. Skilbeck warmly approved of Prawle's proposal to sell our goods and chattels by public auction, and advised that the sale should take place about two in

the afternoon, as by that time the inhabitants would have just finished their dinners, and would accordingly be in the most generous of tempers. She was very anxious that Prawle should enter her service as striker. "I took yon lad," she said, pointing to her assistant, "just out of charity. He had been bad with dysentery at Forest Creek, and hadn't a sixpence in his pocket; but he has never been used to hard work, and he hasn't the strength to wield a smith's hammer."

Prawle replied that he should be very glad to learn blacksmithing; "for," said he, "next to butchering and grog-selling, it seems the most profitable trade in the colony; but first, Mrs. Skilbeck, you must allow me to have my turn at the diggings. If I don't make my fortune there, I shall come and apply to you for a situation."

"Which diggings are you going to?"

"Bendigo."

"That's where Skilbeck is," observed his wife.

"Blacksmithing or digging?"

"Digging, the daft fellow, on Iron Bark Gully, and has never had a week's good luck since he went there. If he would set up a forge, and leave other folks to search for the gold, he might make his fortune. Come, Hoskins," she continued, addressing her striker, "look alive; I can't have book-reading during working hours; here comes Tom Snaith for that bullock-chain."

Poor little Hoskins had taken advantage of his mistress's talkativeness, and had pulled a ragged volume out of his pocket. I peeped over his shoulder. It was the "Lady of the Lake."

Half an hour after this, Prawle gravely mounted an empty sugar-barrel in front of Mrs. Skilbeck's door, and tapping a frying-pan, as if he was trying to attract a

swarm of bees—for we could not borrow a bell in all Belvidere—he addressed the public in the following words:—

“Oh yes! oh yes! oh yes! This is to give notice, that at two o’clock, sharp, this afternoon, a choice assortment of goods will be submitted to public competition on this spot; comprising a carefully-selected stock of the finest groceries, and sundry other articles too numerous to mention. Be in time! be in time! be in time!”

This oration, which Prawle concluded with three solemn taps on the frying-pan, he repeated about twenty times in succession. He confessed that the last phrase, “Be in time,” was not exactly orthodox auctioneering language; he had borrowed it from early recollections of fair time at his native Greenwich. You may wonder why he did not perambulate the streets of Belvidere, as a bellman should do, instead of staying in one place. My answer to this is, that there was only one street in Belvidere, and that anything said in a tolerably loud voice in front of Mrs. Skilbeck’s forge could be heard all over the village.

At two o’clock, quite an imposing assemblage, as Prawle styled it, had gathered together before the auctioneer’s pulpit. Besides ourselves, I counted no less than twenty-three persons, and of these only nine were young children.

The first article offered for sale was a bag of sugar belonging to myself—the bag in fact which got so wet during the storm,

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said old Prawle gravely, “I need not enlarge on the utility of sugar, nor need I dwell on the manner of its production. It is enough to say that it doesn’t sweeten our sorrows, as the ladies do, it certainly sweetens our tea.” (Great applause from Mrs. Skilbeck and the other ladies present.) “Here is a prime

sample, slightly caked by wet, but none the worse for that. I am told that sugar of the most inferior quality is selling in the Bendigo at half a crown a pound."

"Yes, that's true enough," observed a drayman.

"Myself and my mates are sorry, as you may suppose, to lose the chance of a magnificent profit," continued Prawle; "but we have lost three of our horses, and have no means of transporting our merchandise. Who will make me a bid?"

"I'll give yer a shillin' a pound, young man," said the drayman, "for all the sugar you've got."

"Thank you, sir," says Prawle cheerfully. "Any advance on a shilling, ladies and gentlemen?"

The bag was ultimately knocked down to Mrs. Skilbeck for one-and-ninepence—a low price; but the bidders were few and languid.

I am not going all through the sale, which, though very interesting to us at the time, would be very stupid to read about; but I must observe that there was one article which created some enthusiasm,—that was the raspberry syrup. Prawle opened a bottle, and, having procured some water, handed the bottle round to his audience, that they might taste the delicious beverage. During the summer months, drinking water is scarce in many parts of Australia, and of very indifferent flavour. People sometimes like a change from the eternal tea, especially for their children. So the raspberry syrup went off, as Prawle phrased it, "like smoke." Just as he was selling the last case, containing three dozen, a neighbouring squatter rode up, and secured the lot at five shillings a bottle. As it had only cost us eighteenpence, we realized a fine profit on this article; and we wished, as Prawle afterwards remarked, that we could turn our unfortunate horses into the same seduc-



PRAWLE AS AN AUCTIONEER.

tive liquid. Gamboge was in poor condition, and had a sore back. Three pounds was the utmost we could obtain for him. As for Topsy, Señor Robinson declared that nothing would induce him to part with her under ten pounds. For a long time nobody would offer more than eight pounds ten; then Prawle, descending from his pulpit, and apologizing to the company for abandoning the dignified behaviour of an auctioneer, cantered her up and down the street, thereby raising her price ten shillings; finally, a cockatoo farmer—that is to say, a small farmer—agreed to give ten pounds, provided some tea and tobacco were thrown into the bargain.

Prawle was really a capital auctioneer—for, though he made people laugh, he did not behave like a buffoon: there was plenty of sense in what he said. We afterwards drank his health in some colonial beer, very poor sickly stuff compared to the malt liquor of Great Britain—they understand brewing better nowadays in Victoria—and then we totted up our accounts. In spite of Prawle's exertions, the pack-horse speculation had left a very heavy loss behind it. For the joint adventure between Prawle and myself, which had cost me nearly thirty pounds, I received back only eleven. Jemmy Wallington was a little more fortunate, as he had been the principal owner of the raspberry syrup; as for Tom Harvey, he had only a half-share in his goods, the rest having been provided by Captain Spanswick; while Señor Robinson, as I afterwards discovered, owned nothing at all, but was merely the captain's agent. So that I, the youngest of the party, was actually the severest sufferer. But I am not going to worry you about these losses of mine; and, after all, as Prawle observed, we had obtained a great deal of valuable experience. I had become sharper, more active, and more able to depend on myself; I had

learnt more in a few days than I should have learnt in several years if I had stayed in Liverpool.

We were very sorry to part with Topsy; but one horse would have been of no use to us, and we could travel quicker on foot without her. We retained nothing but our blankets and such provisions as were absolutely necessary. We found the tent, though it was only made of calico, rather a bother to lug along; but we arranged to carry it in couples for an hour each; and thus relieve one another. At night, of course, it was a great convenience; for, though the sun was oppressive during the day, the nights were very sharp, and showers of rain fell several times. As we had made up our minds, however bad the weather might be, that we would never pay for sleeping accommodation, I little thought that before I reached the diggings I was destined to pass a night in an ordinary bed, under a roof considerably more substantial than our flimsy calico. The adventure that befell me was on this wise:—

At a spot within twenty or five-and-twenty miles of the Bendigo Creek, where there is now a busy railway-junction and a flourishing little town, there stood in those days a solitary tavern called the Wombat Inn. We had been especially warned against this inn. It bore an evil reputation, and was said to be the accustomed haunt of gentry of the Maconochie and Potter stamp. Accordingly, having reached the neighbourhood at sunset, we carefully avoided the inn, and camped out on the slope of an adjoining hill near a permanent stream of water, which in England would have been called a brook, but which in arid Australia was dignified with the title of the King-Parrot River. It was certainly the most considerable specimen of flowing water which we had seen since we had quitted the banks of the Yarra-Yarra. So Prawle and Jemmy Wallington made up

their minds that there must be fish in it, and, as they had brought hooks and lines with them from Melbourne, they determined to enjoy an evening's fishing. Señor Robinson, and I attended to the pitching of the tent; Tom Harvey, as usual, undertook the cooking. Now, I could not find a suitable spar to make a ridge-pole for our tent, because the travellers, who were constantly passing to and fro, had cut down all the straight small trees, which are generally taken for such a purpose. Accordingly, leaving my mates to light the fire and boil the kettle, I went alone over the ranges to search for a ridge-pole. I could not find a young tree, but, at last, I saw a branch growing horizontally from a moderate-sized tree. The tree had had a fire lighted at its foot; but I thought nothing of that, so many Australian trees having been partially burnt in this manner without seeming any the worse for it. I climbed the tree, and, seating myself on the branch, began to saw it off with my little hand-saw. I need hardly say that I was not so stupid as the man in Gillray's caricature, who sits on the sign-board, and saws off *between* himself and the wall. I took care to be on the *tree-ward* side of the amputation. The branch was a heavy one, laden with foliage. Just as I had sawn it through, a tremendous crash took place, heaven and earth seemed coming together, and I lost all consciousness. When I recovered my senses, I was unable to tell where I was: by degrees memory began to unroll a sort of moving panorama of my life at old Bagshot's academy, of Mrs. McGaffney's Liverpool boarding-house, of my voyage on board the *Ruth Hayward*, and my adventures before starting for the diggings.

While indulging in this strange reverie, I suddenly caught sight of my saw, and it then momentarily flashed upon me that I had come to get a tent-pole, and that my

companions were awaiting me at the foot of the hill. I heard something drip—drip—on my collar, and putting up my hand to ascertain the cause, discovered that I was bleeding freely from the jaw and neck. I then descended slowly towards my mates, fancying that somebody had fired at me by accident or design. The Señor and Tom Harvey uttered an exclamation of astonishment on seeing me; for I was ghastly pale, and like a person walking in his sleep. They returned with me to the hill, and then they discovered that the fire which had been lighted at the foot of the tree had eaten out its heart; that it was a mere shell; and that the shock of the branch fallen, added to my own weight, had brought down the whole concern. As the tree was twice or thrice as big round as a man's body, and as the fork where I was sitting was some twelve feet from the ground, it was almost a miracle that I escaped with merely two or three wounds in the neck and jaw (and a broken tooth or two), caused by the "stubs" of the branches. As my jaw was beginning to grow very stiff, I was anxious to find out if any bones were broken. A doctor, who was travelling up the road, who had pitched a tent close beside us, and to whom we had just before lent a frying-pan, was extremely kind, examined my wounds carefully, pronounced that there were no bones broken, but strongly advised, as it was a damp, chilly night, that I should sleep under a roof and put on a poultice. If Prawle or Jemmy Wallington had returned, one of them would have insisted on going with me; but I did not care to ask Señor Robinson or Tom Harvey to accompany me, as neither of them offered to do so. Accordingly, I crawled over alone to the Wombat Inn, and found there a scene of drunken revelry, which made me, in my faint and weary condition, almost sick at heart. The landlord and his myrmidons

were so busy selling grog that for some time I could get no one to attend to me ; at length a slipshod Irish girl coming out of the kitchen took compassion on me, and 'told me' that she would presently make me a poultice and show me a bed. It was quite early in the evening, for the sun had not long set.

While I was waiting at the bar, a fellow with a villainous countenance tried to claim acquaintance with me, professing to believe that I was a pal of his, and had received these hurts in some thievish affray.

"You were lagged young," he said. "Didn't you come to Hobart Town on board of the *Timbuctoo*?"

"No ; I first landed at Melbourne."

"That be blowed. You're an old hand, young'un. I'll swear I've seen your face somewhere."

I could have said the same of him. But that the patch from the eye had disappeared, and the red beard had been shaved off, I should have recognized him as a member of Captain Maconochie's firm.

"Perhaps you saw me," I ventured to say, "when you were burying your mate, Tiger."

"Ha ! I thought we knew one another. Now then, what are you going to stand ? My pockets are empty. Don't say a word about Tiger here, as you value your life," he added, in a ferocious whisper.

I don't know how I should have shaken this fellow off ; but, luckily, Norah, my Irish sister of mercy, beckoned me to the kitchen, where she tied up my face, and then conducted me to a small bedroom, into which half a dozen beds were crammed. I believe that I fell asleep almost instantly, and slept for some time, although when I afterwards opened my eyes and saw a candle in the room, and a man preparing to get into bed, I felt as if I had only just got into bed

myself. I watched his movements with dreamy curiosity. At the last moment he lighted a pipe, and, leaving the candle unextinguished, got into bed, and covered his head, pipe and all, completely with the clothes. I believed at the time that either the house would be burnt or the man suffocated, yet felt so weary and apathetic that I did not care to raise a finger: however, no harm took place. I was awoke by the sun streaming into the window, and by the voice of the Irish girl saying, "Arn't ye going to get up? 'Tis six o'clock."

"Thank ye," I answered; "I shall lie a bit longer, I don't care to rise so early."

"But it is six o'clock at night," she rejoined.

I had slept all round the clock, for nearly twenty-four hours; and the prolonged quiet and repose did my wounded face a great deal of good. I found Jemmy and Prawle waiting for me down below. They had tried to get in the night before, but had been repulsed, they said, by a drunken man in the bar, who declared that I was his particular friend, that we had been transported together in the same ship to Van Diemen's Land, and that nothing should induce him to give up the key of my room to a couple of suspicious strangers. They did not recognize Redbeard as one of the Maconochie firm. They had come again the next morning, and, hearing that I was asleep, had begged Norah to let me lie as long as I pleased. They were delighted to see me looking so well after my severe tumble, and then produced with great mystery something which they had caught the night before, and which they said they were sure would please me. It was a duck-billed platypus! He had taken the hook, as Prawle said, just as kindly as if he had been a Christian fish, instead of a heathenish zoological jumble. His body was covered with fur like an otter;

his tail resembled that of a beaver ; his feet were partly like a waterfowl's and partly like a porcupine's, his head and beak were almost exactly like a duck's, only the beak was broader. These creatures are warm-blooded, and lay eggs. After we returned to the camp, Señor Robinson skinned the platypus, and I believe it now stands in a glass case in the hall of a certain house not a hundred miles from Huddersfield. For my sake, as my jaw was very painful, we spent the next day in complete rest, and then proceeded by easy journeys to Bendigo.

We soon found Captain Spanswick, who was seated, as usual, on his brown cob, with a fine-flavoured cigar in his mouth. He looked as neat as a new pin, as if he had just stepped out of a Pall Mall club-house, while we were shabby, dusty, and travel-stained.

"Well," said he, "I'm delighted to see you ; and I've made first-rate arrangements for the sale of our produce. Prices are higher than ever, and horses are in brisk demand."

We looked at one another rather foolishly for a minute or two ; then the Señor broke silence. In a melancholy voice, and with downcast eyes, he said, "There are no horses, captain, and there is no produce !"

You should have seen Captain Spanswick's face when he heard our adventures !

For some little time Captain Spanswick appeared very angry, and we were surprised to perceive how meekly Señor Robinson endured his rebukes. This man, who had shown such ungovernable ferocity towards Potter, now stood with his head down, like a sheepish schoolboy who has been caught with a pocketful of stolen apples. But there was nothing vulgar about Captain Spanswick's lecture ; he made no allusions to the Señor's diminutive stature, nor did he

taunt' him because the colour of his skin was nut-brown ; he gravely pointed out to him the various errors of which he had been guilty.

"I cannot blame these young men," he said ; "they are excused by their youth and inexperience ; but I felt that if I could safely entrust a team of packhorses to any man in the colony, I could entrust them to you. Now let us successively consider the manner in which the three horses have been lost. First, with regard to the black horse Coal-scuttle, which was jammed in the gully. Was it prudent, Señor, to allow a lad like Harvey to act as pioneer in an unknown country ?"

"No, captain ; it was imprudent," replied the Señor.

"As you confess your fault, I will say no more about Coal-scuttle. Next for Titicaca."

Señor Robinson uttered a groan. "Say nothing about Titicaca," he muttered. "I alone was in the wrong there. I drank that cursed brandy, and it took away my senses. But we may still recover Titicaca."

"I shall certainly try to do so. I shall at once apply to the police. And Topsy ? Did not she lose her life by a shot from your revolver ?"

"In that case," replied the Señor, "I am scarcely to blame. Those villains of constables, instead of thanking me for the service I had rendered them, loaded me with the grossest abuse ; I raised my revolver, not to shoot, but to demand satisfaction ; one of the troopers rushed upon me like a wild beast, and, in the struggle, the weapon exploded."

"Supposing the ball had killed one of these young men ?"

"I should have been sorry. It would have been an unlucky accident," replied the Señor calmly.

"It would, indeed. You would have been found guilty

of manslaughter, and sentenced to labour for years on the roads, like a felon. Well, well, Señor, I will say no more. We must make the best of a bad job. Gold-digging will, I dare say, repay us for our other losses. To-morrow I will show you the 'claims' which I have marked out. Viewed by the light of geological experience, they promise admirably."

In a conversation which I afterwards had with Prawle, I remarked that I thought Captain Spanswick had behaved in a very magnanimous manner.

"I don't altogether agree with you," answered Prawle. "It's all very fine for the captain to sit there on his horse lecturing us as if he was an alderman at Guildhall, and we were a parcel of refractory paupers; but who did all the hard work? Why, poor old Gonzales and we. While the captain has been ambling up the Bendigo road like a gentleman, stopping at squatters' houses, revelling in kangaroo-soup and all the delicacies of the colony, we have been toiling and sweating like galley-slaves!"

"But Captain Spanswick owned a large share in the horses and stores, Prawle?"

"Yes; that I don't deny. But isn't it rather strange that the Señor had no share in them?"

"I suppose he has no money."

"Yes, he has—three hundred pounds of his own, which he brought from Mexico. He has been telling me about it this morning. He says that Captain Spanswick has a brother, a merchant at Vera Cruz, for whom the Señor entertains a high respect. He made the acquaintance of this Spanswick in Melbourne, in a chance way. The captain would not allow him to invest any of his money in the packhorse speculation; he said, 'No; my brother might blame me if it was lost. I will invest your three hundred

pounds for you in a safe bank ; it will increase at a high rate of interest while you are at the diggings.' 'The captain,' says poor old Gonzales quite enthusiastically, 'is the cleverest and the best man I ever knew.' 'Clever,' thinks I to myself, 'he certainly is ; for he manages to make other people do all the hard work ; but as for his goodness that's another affair.' "

"What a suspicious old fellow you are, Prawle," said I.

"My wits," returned my companion, "have been sharpened by the atmosphere of large towns. I matriculated at Greenwich, passed my little-go at Stratford-le-Bow, and took my degree at Liverpool. Behold me now an M.A.—Master of the Arts of cunning men."

I shall not bother my readers with a long detailed account of the Bendigo diggings, as they have been described over and over again. But I must say that we were extremely disappointed in our first view of the mining region. Before we left Melbourne we heard that there were fifty thousand miners on the Bendigo. We naturally expected a scene of tremendous bustle and activity, and fancied that we should see the fifty thousand gold-hunters all at work close alongside of each other, like ants in an ants' nest. It never entered into our heads that this great number of persons were scattered over an extent of country fully as big as the area of London. Now London contains three millions of inhabitants. Supposing fifty-nine out of every sixty Londoners were suddenly to disappear, very few people would be visible in the streets, and yet the remainder would equal the population of Bendigo at the time when we arrived there. At the central point of the diggings, where the Government Commissioner's Camp, the Post Office, and the Police Barracks were situated, the number of large canvas and wooden stores, with their gay

flags, gave some animation to the scene. As Prawle observed, it reminded him of Greenwich Fair, with all the gingerbread, the scratchbacks, the wild-beast shows, and the fun left out. Between the various gullies and valleys, in which the gold was chiefly found, and which ran parallel with each other, like the streets of a city, there were long solitary stretches of forest upland—"ranges" is the proper Australian expression; and even in the gullies themselves the tents and the working parties were widely scattered. The bottoms of these gullies resembled roughly-executed railway cuttings, the earth having been turned in every direction in search of the precious metal. In fact, when we looked around us, we felt in some despair; for, although only a few months had elapsed since the discovery of the Bendigo gold-field, all the work seemed to have been done, and all the gold carried away. Captain Spanswick had marked out two "claims,"—one on Golden Gully, the other on Peg Leg Gully. Now, if the holder of a claim did no work there during a period of twenty-four hours, anybody else could appropriate the "claim," or "jump" it, as the diggers used to say. But Captain Spanswick had taken care to "shepherd" his claims—that is to say, he had visited each of them at least once during the day, and while there had performed some "tiddly-winking" work, that is, he had shifted a few spadefuls of earth, or used the pickaxe for ten minutes or so, just for the purpose of establishing his title to the property. And now the important question how we were to work our claims had to be decided. It was useless for six persons to work in one hole. Three were enough for each shaft, according to the simple mining fashions of that period. The captain therefore proposed that we should divide ourselves into two parties of three each.

"Now, shall we choose sides, or how?" he asked.

"Prawle and I would like to stick together," I answered, quickly.

"And I should like to join you," said Jemmy Wallington.

"Just the very thing, captain, isn't it?" observed Prawle. "We three will race you three, and see who will be the first to dig out a big nugget. By a big nugget, I mean one the size of a York ham. I shan't be satisfied with anything smaller."

I don't think the captain exactly liked this arrangement. He wanted to secure Prawle for himself; and I think he would have preferred Jemmy or me to the Señor, who, though an excellent horseman, knew nothing of pick and shovel work, and was at least forty years of age. As for Tom Harvey, we reckoned him rather a mollycoddle. He was a capital cook, but he did not care for any work where there was a risk of hurting himself.

"I had hoped you would have joined my division, Mr. Prawle," said the captain. "Remember I have been on the diggings before, and my geological knowledge will be of no small value."

"But surely, captain," cried Prawle, good-humouredly, "you won't cut us altogether. You'll come and show us how to set to work, won't you?"

"Oh, yes! I shall be most happy to afford you any information. Indeed, I am bound to do so, as the two claims will have a joint interest in each other's success."

On hearing these words, Prawle winked solemnly twice in succession, first with his right eye at me, and then with his left eye at Jemmy Wallington.

"The two claims are two miles apart, are they not, captain?" he said.

"Yes, about two miles."

"We shan't care to travel two miles of rough road oftener than we can help after a hard day's work," observed Prawle. "Captain Spanswick, I don't expect we shall see much of one another, and therefore I recommend that those fellows who work together should share profits together, and with no one else."

"Hear, hear!" cried Jemmy.

"Why that is as much as to propose a dissolution of partnership!" exclaimed Captain Spanswick.

"Yes, it does come to pretty much the same thing," replied Prawle, coolly.

"I think, Mr. Prawle, I deserve a little more consideration at your hands. You seem to forget all the trouble I have undergone in bringing you up here."

At these words, Prawle clapped his hands to his sides, and burst into a merry, chuckling laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he cried. "Oh, ye gods and little fishes! I can stand a good deal, but I can't help grinning over this piece of fun. Why, what trouble have you had, Captain Spanswick, to bring us three up to Bendigo? We paid for everything, horses and stores, out of our own pockets—I should speak more correctly if I said that Scudamore paid for me,—and our own legs carried us up the road. For the life of me, I can't make out what service you have rendered us. The only thing for which we are indebted to you is a heavy loss."

"Caused, Mr. Prawle, by your own mismanagement," answered the captain.

"Just now you laid all the blame on your own agent, Captain Spanswick," returned Prawle: "you mustn't blow hot one minute and cool another. Mind, it isn't I that complain of the Señor. I think Señor Robinson" ("barring a tendency to put prisoners to death in cold blood," he

whispered aside to me) "is a downright good fellow. Three cheers for the Señor, and may his shadow never be less!" concluded Prawle, mischievously pointing to the solar reflection of the corpulent little Mexican, which looked more like the outline of a barrel on skids than the shadow of a human being.

"Three cheers for the Señor!" cried Jemmy and I, waving our hats. The captain and Tom Harvey could not refuse to join in the salutation.

Señor Gonzales Robinson acknowledged the compliment with the profoundest gravity—for he had not watched Prawle's "aside,"—and bowed till his nose nearly touched the ground, and the baser portion of his body formed a horizontal line with the back of his head.

"Mr. Prawle," he said, "my thanks. Gentlemen all, I tried to do well. Forgive me for doing badly."

"And now, Captain Spanswick," said Prawle, "don't let us part ill friends."

"My dear fellow," returned the captain, suddenly becoming enthusiastic, "I have no such intention. I have the highest respect for you and your mates. As a proof of my respect, allow me to make over to you the claim which I had marked out on Peg Leg Gully."

Once more Prawle winked solemnly at us.

"Thank you, Captain Spanswick," he answered, "I think we had better mark out a claim for ourselves."

"I don't ask you a sixpence for it," said the captain, "and my geological researches are worth something. I could sell the claim this very day for fifty pounds, cash down."

"Sell it then, my dear Captain Spanswick," cried Prawle, "sell it by all means. Jemmy and Stephen and I are very proud fellows. We mean to work on our own

account, and if we make a hit, we want to have all the credit of it."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*; that is what you were thinking of, weren't you, Prawle, when Captain Spanswick made his offer?" said I, as soon we three were alone together.

"No, I wasn't, because I don't understand Greek."

"Greek! It's Latin, it's out of the *Æneid*."

"Oh, is it? What does it mean?"

"It refers to the bringing of the wooden horse within the walls of Troy. 'I distrust the Greeks, especially when they bring gifts.'"

"Good; that's just my opinion of the captain. I don't want to have anything to do either with him or his claim. I'm delighted to be out of the partnership."

"And I," said Jemmy.

"And I," said the author of this narrative.

"Shall we stick together like bricks?" asked Prawle.

"Yes, yes," we answered.

"All right then; let us begin business at once. We'll pack up our 'swags,' and go to Iron Bark Gully."

"Why to Iron Bark Gully?"

"Don't you recollect the lady blacksmith at Carambong? She asked me to call upon her husband."

We "humped our swags"—that is, we placed our baggage on our shoulders—and soon reached Iron Bark Gully. As I have already remarked of other gullies, it looked like a deserted railway cutting. Tents were scattered here and there, and every now and then we saw a party of miners at work. We asked for a man called Skilbeck, and were recommended to apply at a store-tent where most of the Iron Barkers bought their groceries.

The proprietor of the store knew the tent where Skilbeck lived, but did not know where he worked.

"Yonder is the tent," he said, "and Skilbeck will be home presently to dinner."

The front of the tent was shut up, and was guarded by a large, black retriever dog, which was chained to a log, and barked furiously at all passers-by. While we were waiting for Skilbeck we sat down to rest under the scanty shade afforded by one of the Iron Bark trees. These curious trees resemble a cork-tree that has been burnt; but, as some of my readers may never have seen a cork-tree, I had better tell them that the outer coating of the Iron Bark tree is very thick, and hangs to the tree in great irregular masses like lumps of rusty iron. We afterwards found this bark very useful for kindling fires.

We lay idly watching the sun creeping slowly upwards against the fork of a tree until he stood still, and then we knew that it was twelve o'clock. A few minutes afterwards a tall handsome man with a bushy brown beard and a curly brown head, and with the legs of his trousers all besmeared with blue and yellow splashes of clay, came striding along, whistling "Cheer, boys, cheer." Directly he arrived abreast of the tent the black dog ceased barking, and began to wag his tail violently.

"Mr. Skilbeck!" cried Prawle.

"Hullo!" he answered, turning sharply round. "Yes, I'm Skilbeck. What is it?"

"We've come from the Carambong Creek!"

"Have ye?" he said rather gruffly, as much as to imply, "What do I care if you have?"

"I've brought this from your wife," said Prawle, handing Mr. Skilbeck a letter and a good-sized parcel.

The letter was not long, but it took Mr. Skilbeck nearly

ten minutes to spell it out. He then opened the parcel which contained two blue flannel shirts and other domestic articles.

"Come from Carambong afoot?" demanded Mr. Skilbeck.

"Yes," said Prawl.

"Thank ye for fetching these here things. If you'll sit down, the lot of ye, on that log there, I'll give ye a bit of dinner. Down, Muzzler. Don't you be afeerd, young man,"—to Jemmy—"he won't venture to touch ye, if I says 'Down, Muzzler.'"

We soon grew as thick as inkle-weavers. Inkle, I may observe, by way of explaining this old-fashioned saying, is, or was, a coarse species of tape, the makers of which sat very close together.

"I'm rough and gruff," observed Mr. Skilbeck, "at the first onset, but a good-natured action I don't forget."

He then told us an anecdote about Muzzler, which showed that the words "Down, Muzzler," were not always efficacious, even from his own mouth.

"T'other night I was acoming home from work just as it grew dusk. My hands were full of tools, so I flung an empty flour sack, which I wanted to bring home, over my head. Muzzler went on growling till I got within a yard of him. 'Hollo, Muzzler,' I says, 'don't you know me?' Instead of leaving off growling he flew at my throat, and hung on there. 'Hollo!' I says. Still he hung on. 'Hollo!' I says, fiercer than ever. Not a bit would he let go. I was beginning to feel throttled-like when the sack fell off my face. As soon as he saw me he dropped like a shot, and began wagging his tail. He's a rare dog for 'possums, is Muzzler. Hey! Muzzler, 'possum, 'possum!"

At these words Muzzler ran out to the full extent of his chain and began to bark furiously up the nearest tree he could reach.

"See that? He understands like any Christian. But when he saw Sam Skilbeck with his face covered up, he thought he must be a thief, didn't ye, Muzzler?"

"And do you live all alone here, Mr. Skilbeck?" I asked, as the owner of the tent sat smoking his after-dinner pipe.

"Yes, me and Muzzler and Banbury—that's our horse—lives all alone here. My mates live at Dead Dog Gully, where we're sinking a shaft. So the old lady wants me back again at the anvil, do she?" he said, addressing Prawle.

Prawle replied that blacksmithing, in Mrs. Skilbeck's opinion, paid better than gold-digging.

"Ay, so she says now, because we haven't dropped on it; we're barely earning stonebreakers' wages at present. Wait till we drop on it, wait till we get a hole with five hundred ounces in it, then Mrs. S. will change her tune."

We found Sam Skilbeck a most useful friend; in fact, I hardly know what three such greenhorns as we were in all matters appertaining to gold-mining would have done without him. As we had no tent, for the old calico one we left in Señor Robinson's hands, he made us bring our blankets into his abode for the night. I went to bed very early, for I was quite tired out, and the wound in my neck was still painful. Some hours later I was woke up—I daresay by the noise of firearms, for everybody who had a gun or a pistol on the diggings made a point of firing it off and reloading it before going to bed, and as soon as these weapons were discharged, all the dogs, and their name was Legion, set up a dreadful barking and howling, so that no

wonder a new comer was disturbed by the din. At any rate, I woke up, and perceived in the dim light my mates ~~and~~ Mr. Skilbeck, our host, lying huddled together on the floor of the tent. But on casting my eyes in another direction, I saw something that startled me terribly. The head of a monstrous animal of a whitish colour was thrust through the tent-door. I could hear the sound of its breathing in spite of Mr. Skilbeck's snores. What could it be? It was far bigger than a kangaroo or any native animal I had ever heard of. Perhaps it was the Bunyip, a monster which is said to inhabit the Murray River, and which is a cross between an ostrich and a hippopotamus. I was so alarmed that, although poor Skilbeck had been toiling hard all day, I ventured to pull his sleeve and wake him up. He took it very good-naturedly.

"What's the matter, my boy?" he said. "D'ye want a drink of tea?"

"No, I want to know what that is?" I whispered in reply, pointing with my finger towards the tent-door.

"Mr. Skilbeck burst into a hearty laugh.

"Ha! ha! Why, did he frighten ye? That's old Banbury, our white horse, he always sleeps with his head in the tent for company, and if you was to go outside you'd find Muzzler coiled up on his back."

In the morning Prawle roasted me unmercifully for being so easily alarmed, saying that he must advertise in the *Bendigo Times* for a nursery-maid, Master Stephen being too timid to sleep alone. But I believe if Prawle had not been told of Banbury's habits before going to bed, and had suddenly woke up, he would have been just as much frightened as I was. Sam Skilbeck was very proud and very fond of Banbury. He had owned him more than nine years, a long time, as he observed, in a colony where people

were always swopping horses, and watches, and dogs, and wives.

"Don't believe in so much swopping," he said. "I've got a good horse, a good dog, and a good wife, so why should I change 'em?" To which Prawle sagely answered, "Why, indeed?"

Sam Skilbeck put us up to all sorts of dodges for saving our money, of which we had little enough to spare. He recommended us to buy our tent and tools at second-hand. "Every day," he said, "there's folks leaving the Bendigo, as don't never mean to dig no more."

"Having made their fortunes?" asked Jemmy.

"Well, not exactly; folks as has been unlucky, can't stand the work and such like."

We took Sam's advice, and for a moderate sum, secured a nice little tent, a set of picks and shovels, a puddling-tub, and a cradle. The last was the most expensive article of all, as it was, comparatively speaking, a complicated piece of machinery. I will describe it presently.

"Now," said Mr. Skilbeck, "I can see you young gentlemen are as eager to mark out a claim, as Muzzler is to be up a gum-tree after a 'possum. But a dog can't climb, although he's very useful at the foot of a tree, and you can't dig, although——"

"Can't we dig?" cried Prawle, flourishing his pickaxe, "you shall just see us!"

"You can't dig, sir," answered Mr. Skilbeck, with a solemn shake of his head, "not as a real digger ought to dig. You're young, you're tender, you han't been used to rough it. Take my advice, don't you attempt at present to mark out any claims, or sink any shafts; begin by working in old ground, and, first of all, get some notion of the work by visiting me and my mates over at Dead Dog Gully." •

At first we scorned the idea of taking advantage of other men's labours by "fossicking," as it is called, in deserted holes, but Sam Skilbeck soon gave us some reasons for changing our opinion. "S'pose," said he, "you was toiling along on a hot day, with a heavy swag on your back, and a chap was to offer you a lift in his spring cart, wouldn't you be a fool to refuse? Why of course you would. And in the same manner, you'd be silly to refuse making use of a hole which has been dug by another man."

"But what's the use of a hole," asked Jemmy, "when all the gold has been taken out of it?"

"Ah! that's jest the point," answered Mr. Skilbeck. "There's plenty of shafts along this very gully, that have never been properly bottomed."

"How came that to happen?" I asked.

"In twenty different ways. Perhaps the water came in, and drowned 'em out, perhaps they squabbled and split partnership, perhaps they heard of something better elsewhere, perhaps they lost heart, perhaps they'd no money. I'll show ye half a dozen such holes—they may be shicers,*—of course I can't tell—but there may be a fortune in every one of them. First and foremost, however, come over to Dead Dog, and see us at work."

So we visited the gully with this unsavoury name, and by dint of using our eyes and asking questions, picked up a good deal of useful knowledge. The stratum of soil which contained the gold was generally found in these gullies resting on a bed of decomposed slate, or pipe-clay as it was termed, so that when this pipe-clay was reached the claim was said to be bottomed. This pipe-clay lay sometimes within three feet of the surface, sometimes it was not reached

* That is, holes in which no gold is to be found.

for forty or fifty feet ; but the majority of the shafts on the Bendigo, where the sinking is what is called "shallow," varied from six to five-and-twenty feet in depth. When the bottom is reached the miners begin to tunnel, or drive galleries sideways, supporting the roof of these underground passages by means of "struts" of timber. The shaft belonging to Messrs. Skilbeck & Co. was about twenty feet deep, and circular, exactly like a well. When we went there, the bottom had been reached, and they were sending up "wash-dirt,"—that is, the bluish-yellow marly stratum which contains the gold, if any gold is to be found at all. We asked Mr. Skilbeck if the grains and nuggets of gold were visible to the man in the shaft. "Not often," he answered, "unless the stuff is very rich, because the greasiness of the clay covers up every speck of gold in a dirt skin."

Now for the mining operations, as practised in those primitive days. Over the shaft were fastened three poles, straddle-legs fashion, tied together at the top, from which hung a block and pulley. Bill Appleyard was at the bottom of the shaft, "getting" with the pick, and filling bucket after bucket with the dirt so obtained. These buckets were hoisted up by Sam Skilbeck, and their contents emptied into a big tub, where they were puddled—that is, worked about by means of a spade and plenty of water by Toby Wheeler. This puddling process got rid of all the sticky mud. Nothing now remained but sand, gravel, and gold. This was shovelled in a mass into the "hopper" of the cradle. Wheeler rocked the cradle with his foot, while Sam poured water from a superannuated "billy" on to the hopper or sieve. All the sand and gold passed into the receiver below, the pebbles remained in the hopper, and were thrown away. Then came the most interesting operation of all. Mr. Skilbeck placed this

precious residuum of sand in a tin dish, and going to the edge of a pond, skilfully tilted the dish backwards and ~~itwards~~, partly under water, so as by degrees to jerk all the sand out of it. But we were greatly disappointed to see how few were the specks of yellow metal that remained at the bottom when all was done.

"Little as you may think of it," observed Mr. Skilbeck in reply, "it's the richest take we've had out of this hole. I say, Toby," he shouted, "the stuff's turning out first-rate. Now Mr. Prawle and young gentlemen, look you here; this pinch of gold, which you laugh at, weighs a pennyweight; twenty pennyweights make an ounce; and if we can wash fifteen tubs a day—as we ought to do, between sunrise and sunset,—and they all turn out as well as this, we shall have earned three-quarters of an ounce of gold, which, at seventy shillings an ounce, will come to about seventeen shillings a head. Not that that's anything to brag of. As my old lady says, I could do better at blacksmithing."

"And where do you keep your gold?" I asked.

"There ain't enough of it," laughed Toby Wheeler, "to give us much trouble. This wooden match-box will hold a pound weight, and you see it isn't a quarter full yet. Howsoever, we live in hopes of better days."

That afternoon Mr. Skilbeck pointed out to us, on Iron Bark Gully, what he considered a likely hole. We at once set to work, fearing that somebody else would "jump" it if we did not take possession. We went into the bush, and, after a great deal of trouble, got three spars, on which to rig our windlass. The hole was filled with water to within half a dozen feet of the surface; but upon sounding with a stone tied to a string, we found the actual depth to be five-and-twenty feet. Mr. Skilbeck drily observed—

though Prawle said he could hardly be dry on such a watery subject—that we had our work cut out for us. Next morning we began bailing out with the utmost vigour, and were pleased to see that before nightfall we had made a decided impression on the body of water ; thus proving that the underground springs, if there were any, were of a trifling character. Day after day we worked away at the bailing process, which became more difficult the deeper we got, till at last one of us used to go down, and, sitting astride of a little platform, such as sailors employ when they are painting the outside of a ship, sent up bucketfuls of water to his mates above. It was very dull, monotonous labour, quite different from the exciting picture we had formed of the gold-diggings at home. In our minds' eyes we had beheld eager crowds of men working close together, scratching up glittering nuggets by the handful. However, when Prawle announced, on Saturday night, that there were only four feet of water in the hole, we all looked forward anxiously to Monday morning, when we might really hope to begin searching for gold. Up to this time, except in Sam Skilbeck's tin dish, we had not seen a speck of the precious metal.

Sunday was strictly observed as a gold-mining holiday all over the diggings. There were no churches, but meetings were held for worship in several of the larger tents. Most persons, however, took the opportunity of doing a number of things on that day for which they had no time during the week. Mr. Skilbeck, for instance, washed his shirts and other wearing apparel. I saw him gravely ironing his black silk neckerchief with the head of a broad axe ; he also baked a joint of meat, with potatoes, in a camp-oven,—quite a luxurious dinner, which he had invited his mates to partake of with him. A camp-oven, I may observe, is a sort of

large iron pot, with a close-fitting lid; the article to be baked is placed inside, and hot wood-ashes are heaped ~~around~~ and on top of the vessel till the proper degree of cookery is attained. Everybody, I suppose, knows that a "damper" is merely an unleavened cake made of flour and water; but everybody does not know, till I tell them, what dreadful dampers we had been obliged to eat since we parted with that skilful cook Tom Harvey. His culinary mantle had certainly not fallen on the shoulders of Jemmy Wallington. The first damper Jemmy made was baked in the ashes, as we had not then bought a camp-oven. I dare say it had been kneaded very fairly, but it was so underdone and heavy, that we all suffered from the nightmare after eating it. He next went to the opposite extreme—it was charred through and through; it looked and felt, as Prawle said, exactly like a frying-pan without a handle. The next essay was baked in Mr. Skilbeck's camp-oven, and not badly baked, but it tasted most vilely of onions—Jemmy having neglected to scald out the oven, which had been used on the previous Sunday for cooking a hand of pork. Prawle now insisted that I should take the damper manufacture in hand, and I succeeded pretty fairly.

The barking of dogs and the discharge of firearms was worse than ever on Sunday afternoon; for numbers of diggers, dressed in their best clothes, were stalking about the bush, popping at parrots, wattle-birds, and such-like small game. Just before sunset a heavy shower took place, and I was surprised to see, as soon as the rain had ceased, that a number of persons issued from their tents, and began diligently examining the dirt-heaps at the mouths of the different shafts. We asked Mr. Skilbeck what was the meaning of this.

"They are looking for nuggets," he replied. "They often lie unnoticed in the dirt thrown out of the holes, till a heavy shower washes 'em clean."

On hearing this we all sallied forth, straining our eyes and stooping our backs till it was quite dark. Prawle and I found nothing; but we heard a joyful exclamation from Jemmy.

"How big?" asked Prawle. "As big as your head?"

"Not quite," answered Jemmy, laughing.

"As big as your great toe?"

"I shan't tell you. Come and see."

"Pooh! I think nothing of that," said Prawle contemptuously, when Jemmy had shown us a very pretty little nugget as big as a small pea. "I scorn to pick up anything under an ounce weight, eh, Mr. Skilbeck?"

Prawle was only chaffing; he was delighted at Jemmy's good-fortune. Mr. Skilbeck observed that it was a lucky "homen," and advised Jemmy to have the nugget made into a breast-pin, or, better still, send it home to his sweetheart.

The next day is marked in my Bendigo Calendar as Black Monday. Prawle began to descend the shaft, intending to stand at the bottom up to his waist in water, and send buckets up until the mine was dry. He went down hand over hand, or, rather, hand under hand; but being an awkward climber, he steadied himself by placing his feet against the sides of the shaft. A piece of earth, to which he was trusting his foot, gave way: he lost control of his hands, and fell feet foremost to the bottom. We hoped that he was not much hurt, thinking that the four feet of water would break his fall. But he was evidently suffering great pain, although he tried to make light of his tumble. We were unable to see him very clearly in the obscurity of five-and-twenty feet below the surface, but we

observed that he held his hands in a peculiar way ; and he told us that unless we could pull him out of the shaft, he must stay there for the rest of his days. Upon hearing this, we lowered him a rope, one end of which we passed through the block at the top of our windlass, while Prawle made the other end fast under his arms ; but our united efforts were unable to pull such a heavy fellow up. So we were obliged to go and entreat a neighbouring party of miners to come to our assistance. We were rather shy of going near them, for they were a rough, foul-mouthed set of fellows, who came from Van Diemen's Land. As diggers they were very lucky, but they spent all their earnings in drink, and when in liquor, quarrelled and fought with each other. We disliked asking them, but nobody else was at work within a quarter of a mile of us. The moment, however, they heard what had happened, they knocked off work, and came and pulled Prawle out. The poor fellow fainted dead away as soon as he "came to grass," and no wonder, for the rope had "slithered" through his hands, and had cut his fingers completely to the bone. He afterwards told me that he never had endured greater agony, and that if he had not had the water to dip his burning hands into, he should have become frantic. These rough Vandemonians were ever so kind ; they carefully wrapped Prawle's hands in rags dipped in grease and flour ; they went to their tent for the remains of a bottle of brandy—a very expensive article on the diggings at that time,—made him swallow a "nip," and insisted on his keeping the remainder. They warned me and Jemmy, before they went back to work that poor Prawle would not be fit for work for a fortnight. "And take care," they said, "now the hot weather is coming on, that the blow-flies don't get at the sore places."

The blow-flies are certainly most repulsive creatures. The English bluebottles are bad enough, but they only lay *larvæ*, which require time and warmth to kindle them into life: their Australian sisters lay living maggots; and nothing pleases them better than to lay them in the living flesh. Woe to the bullock that has a sore back! Woe to the drunkard who falls, wounds his skin in falling, and then sinks into a heavy apoplectic sleep! During the summer, we made acquaintance with a young man who had been a linendraper's assistant in London. He was a very nice-looking, fair-skinned, rather womanish fellow in appearance, but with plenty of pluck about him. He went to work on the diggings, and rashly exposed his bare arms to the scorching sun. The heat raised his tender skin in blisters, the fiendish blow-flies got at the blisters. Poor fellow, he was a dreadful spectacle! He recovered at last, but he will carry the scars to his grave. As for the impudence of the blow-flies in smaller matters, it almost passes belief. In those days the butchers were very independent—they would cut no small pieces; you must either take a quarter of a sheep, or go without mutton. I used to put the meat at once into a sack, and carry it home to the tent; but as two or three blow-flies would contrive to get into the sack at the same time, the meat was generally covered with maggots, every one of which had to be carefully scraped off. In the hot weather I used to hate the sight of fresh meat thrice a day; especially when, as once or twice happened, we had no salt, and not a particle of bread to eat it with. Mr. Skilbeck used to keep his meat carefully secured in a bag, and slung over the limb of a tree at a height of some twenty feet from the ground. He declared that the blow-flies never flew so high.

While on the subject of flies, I may say a few words

about the common house flies, which in hot dry countries, such as Egypt and Australia, become a perfect torment. In the much warmer but moister climate of Bengal, the ordinary flies are comparatively few in number, and seldom trouble you. There is a reason for this. The common fly (*musca domestica*) is a very thirsty creature, and when he settles on the human face divine, it is for the sake of the moisture which he finds there. They have a curious habit, also, of settling on the back of persons walking out of doors, probably because it is the only part of the body which is not in violent motion. I once walked down from the diggings with an amusing fellow, who stepped out at such a prodigious pace that after a few miles I was compelled to drop astern. He walked as if he was walking for a wager, and I remember that his chief grievance was that he had to carry "a pound weight of flies" on his back. It used to be considered a breach of good manners in Melbourne, if you did not whisk a handkerchief over your back before entering a house, for no lady desired an additional importation of flies to her drawing-room. In fact, a visitor with flies on his back was reckoned as rude and as unwelcome as if he had had mud on his boots. The flies were really a serious plague during the summer months. Men wore veils or carried green boughs in their hands as a protection against them, and the latter custom gave the bullock-drivers, who are generally among the roughest of Her Majesty's subjects, an appearance of Arcadian simplicity. I have often amused myself with watching the involuntary gesticulations made by persons when talking together in order to get rid of the flies. I believe the plague of flies in hot countries might be much abated if all decaying animal and vegetable matter was burnt or buried, and their thirst, which renders them so

tormenting, may be allayed indoors by occasionally watering the floor, and by placing shallow vessels of water about the room. 'Enough about flies. People who have never quitted England don't know how much we owe to our chilly winds and foggy skies. Setting aside bugs and fleas and black beetles, all of which may be kept under by cleanliness, insect life rarely produces human misery in this country.

Prawle's accident was a sad blow to our gold-digging prospects, for Jemmy Wallington and I could not do much by ourselves. However, we did do something. We bailed all the water out of our shaft, and then perseveringly sent up bucket after bucket of stuff which we believed to be wash-dirt. For any advantage we obtained, we might as well have been grubbing among the gravel-pits on Hampstead Heath. "Yes," said old Prawle, who was reading a dog's-eared romance belonging to one of the Vandemonians, and entitled "Cariboo the Cut-throat : the True Story of a North American Indian, who devoted himself to Deeds of Robbery and Murder at the East End of London." "Yes, and on Hampstead Heath you would have a decided advantage."

"We should be nearer home," observed Jemmy.

"Ay, and you wouldn't be noticed so much as you are here, because there would be other donkeys about."

"Thank you," said I. "Prawle is getting better decidedly. Jemmy, he has made a joke."

We consulted Mr. Skilbeck concerning our mine. He very kindly went down the shaft at daylight the next morning, tried all round with the pick, and sent up many bucketsful of wash-dirt. As these bucketsful did not yield a particle of gold, Mr. Skilbeck pronounced the shaft a "shicer." "If there had ever been any gold in it," he said,

"they'd have left some behind 'em. They couldn't have cleared it out entirely."

We began to grow rather despondent. Prawl would be fit for no harder work than "Cariboo the Cut-throat" for some time to come, and our little stock of money was rapidly dwindling away in the purchase of provisions. Flour was two shillings a pound, sugar was half a crown a pound; everything was dear except butcher's meat.

Jemmy and I tried several other deserted shafts, but not a speck of gold could we find in any of them, though that was probably owing to our unskilfulness. We began to think that Fortune had marked us down in her black books, when our excellent friend Sam Skilbeck made us a proposal.

"My mate, Bill Appleyard," he said, "wants to go down to Melbourne for a fortnight. His missis has come out aboard of the *Boomerang*. Me and Toby are agreeable to take in one of you two till Bill comes back, and we'll give you a third share of all we make during that time."

Our eyes sparkled. Both of us wanted to join Sam Skilbeck.

"Which do you you choose?" I asked, after we had thanked Mr. Skilbeck.

"Well, me and Toby would sooner have the biggest. But don't you look so glum, Master Stephen, I've got a job for you too. You know Tom Prince as keeps the store down the gully where the blue-spotted flag flies?"

Mr. Prince was our grocer, so of course I answered "Yes."

"Well, Tom Prince wants an assistant. He wants somebody as he can leave in the store, while he drives down to the Camp; and, as he finds it lonely at nights, he wants his assistant to sleep there. I recommended you, Master

Stephen, 'temp'ry.' A pound a week and your tucker isn't to be sneezed at, even on a gold-field."

To us the field had hitherto been anything but a field of gold, so we both joyfully accepted the offers. Jemmy went to Dead Dog Gully, returning to spend the night with Prawle at our tent; while I proceeded to the Coggeshall Store—as Mr. Prince's establishment was named. As Prawle did not care to be left alone, he proposed to spend the daylight hours in my society at the store, observing to the proprietor that, although unable to use his hands, his wits might possibly be of some service. He then craved a private conference with Mr. Prince in the back part of his tent.

An hour afterwards he emerged, dressed in an extraordinary costume. He wore a cocked hat and a swallow-tailed coat, ingeniously constructed of brown paper; his long legs were encased in a pair of thigh boots, and a scarlet sash ornamented his waist. On his hat and coat were written in large letters, "Coggeshall store, No. 197,325, opposite a gum-tree, Iron Bark Gully! The cheapest and best Clothing and Provision shop in the Australian Colonies!" He then proceeded to perambulate the neighbourhood, having first rehearsed the following speech:—

"Fellow diggers, I am not a mountebank, though I look like one. I adopt this dress simply to attract your attention. I want you to patronize Tom Prince, a really honest fellow, who sells you a good article at a moderate price. You may ask why I loaf about instead of working. I am a digger like yourselves, but I slipped down a shaft and took all the skin off my hands. In a fortnight

I hope to be a digger again. Don't forget the address—No. 197,325, opposite a gum-tree. You can't mistake, if you bear in mind that it's opposite a gum-tree."

I candidly confess that I felt rather ashamed of Prawle as he marched away ; he looked such a regular Guy.

"I'm sorry, Stephen, that you think I made a fool of myself," said Prawle that evening after we had shut up shop, "but I had a reason for my foolery. I wanted to do Tom Prince a good turn, and I have been the means of putting several ounces of gold into his pocket."

This was perfectly true. Storekeeping on the diggings, in those days, was carried on upon a very primitive plan. Nobody had then hit on the idea, though it has since been extensively carried out, of sticking advertisements on all the gum-trees, still less had anybody conceived the notion of dressing up a human being like a Merry Andrew and sending him forth as a walking advertisement. The various diggers along the line of route which Prawle took stared when they saw such an extraordinary figure approaching, set him down as a "cranky fellow" who certainly had "a shingle short," or, as we say in England, who had "a slate off the roof"; but, nevertheless, when they entered into conversation with him, they were obliged to allow that there was a kernel of shrewdness and good sense under his outward shell of buffoonery. It was Saturday, the day for laying in their weekly supplies, so several of them said—

"Let's go and have a look at this Tom Prince's place!" and ended by buying largely.

The storekeeper showed his gratitude by presenting Prawle with a Westphalia ham, a welcome change after so much fresh meat.

I did not exactly dislike the life at Tom Prince's place ; there was generally plenty of work to do, and plenty of

variety in my occupations. At one minute I was weighing out tea and sugar, then I was cutting slices from a fitch of bacon with a sharp knife, then I was opening a tin of sardines for a customer who had never seen such an article before, then I was helping a man to try on a pair of new boots. These great rough-bearded fellows were as fastidious about the fit of their boots as any young lady; they would sit on a tree-stump in front of the tent trying on pair after pair; and as I had to do all the pully-hawley work in getting them off again, I found the boot-department one of the hardest in our business.

"How my sister Lucy would laugh," said I, "if she could see me now. 'So this is the end of all your grand expectations, Steve,' she would say. 'Sixteen thousand miles of travelling, and only a shop-boy at last.'"

Prawle, however, declared that Lucy—though he had never set eyes on her—must be far too sensible a girl to utter such nonsense. "If I was your sister," he said, "I should like you all the better for learning a fresh trade and turning an honest penny at a time when you are incapacitated from digging by the crippled condition of your unfortunate mate." Prawle uttered these last words with the whine of the regular professional mendicant, and with such a roll of his goggle eyes that I burst out laughing. "I can tell you I'm getting tired of idleness," he continued, with a yawn. "I've read 'Cariboo the Cut-throat' twice through, and I've got nothing whatever to do.

"I'm a poor chap from Liverpool,
And I've got no work to do,
I've got no work to do-o-o-o."

"Yes, I have," he suddenly cried: "I've got an idea—a splendid idea! Mr. Prince," he said, addressing the store-

keeper, who was just dismounting from his spring-cart, will you, as Buckstone says in the play, 'lend me five shillings'? On second thoughts, it will be more convenient if you make it ten." The storekeeper handed Prawle a one-pound note, and he at once strode away as fast as his long legs would carry him towards the camp, where the wholesale stores were situated.

"He's a clever fellow," observed Tom Prince; "I wonder what he's up to."

But just then some customers came in to sell gold, which put a stop to our conversation. Tom Prince did a good business as a gold-buyer, partly because he never pressed people to take his goods in exchange for their gold, but still more because he was thoroughly honest. The poor hard-toiling diggers were exposed to many rogueries in this respect. Some storekeepers used to insert a small piece of paper into the box-end of the scale, so that an undue quantity of gold was required before it would kick the beam. One ingenious gentleman wore a great deal of bear's grease on his hair, and he would run his fingers through his oily locks, and then sift the gold which lay on the counter before him. Some of it used to stick, just as the coin stuck to the yard measure in the *Forty Thieves*, and the combings of his head yielded a valuable harvest. But the storekeepers were themselves liable to be taken in. Base metal was purposely manufactured by the Chinese, and also, I am ashamed to say, in Birmingham, and this rubbish was exported for the adulteration of genuine gold.

Prawle returned with several parcels in his hand. He then obtained some sugar from Tom Prince, and began to boil it to a syrup in a large billy.

"He's making toffee," said I, rather scornfully. "The diggers won't eat toffee, Prawle!"

"Wait and see," he replied, mysteriously.

In the course of the day he requested our presence in the back part of the shop. He was standing with a tumbler and two black bottles before him, and reminded me of Professor Capsicum at the Polypicnic Institution, when he is about to perform an experiment.

"Gentlemen," said Prawle, addressing us with as much gravity and formality as if we were five hundred people. "Gentlemen, you observe the simple apparatus now before me. Here is a tumbler which I fill with water, filtered for the occasion by Skilbeck's patent process. I pour in some of the contents of one bottle, and stir it with a spoon. Upon adding a small portion from the other bottle you will perceive that effervescence takes place. Please to taste the result." He handed a foaming glass to Tom Prince.

"Capital!" exclaimed Tom, as he smacked his lips after emptying the glass.

Prawle next furnished me with a tumbler; he then produced a sheet of paper on which he had written in large characters—

"PRAWLE'S CELEBRATED GINGER* BEER ! SIXPENCE A
GLASS ! !"

"I should like," he said, "to go down to posterity as the author of something. I can't write a book, so I have invented a beverage."

Prawle's effervescing drink consisted of nothing more than sugar-syrup, powdered ginger, carbonate of soda, and tartaric acid; but it took wonderfully with the diggers. They called it "jump-up," and they spent their sixpences as freely as working-men at home would spend their pennies. And Prawle felt quite proud when one day the Gold Commissioner—who was the greatest man on Beh-

Bigo—drew up before the tent door with fifteen mounted troopers under his command, munificently ordered glasses round, drank a glass himself, and having laid down a one-pound note in payment, galloped off without demanding change.

The weather was becoming hotter every day, and many of the ponds and little streams which had been formed by the winter rains were drying up. We soon had to go some distance in order to procure water for making our tea, and this water was literally the colour of pea-soup, being highly charged with the unctuous clay of the district. But it did not make bad tea, and, if you will believe me, the clay gave the tea a creamy flavour, which, in the absence of milk, was very acceptable. Then Sam Skilbeck showed us a simple way of filtering this muddy water. Overnight he filled a tub with water, and threw into it several pieces of red-hot charcoal. In the morning, the mud had all sunk towards the bottom, leaving a perfectly transparent stratum, which could be skimmed off with a pannikin.

I may mention here that the fifth of November was observed on the Bendigo in a very noticeable manner. No Guy Fawkeses were carried about, for there were no little boys and girls to care for such things; but at night the whole country in every direction was lit up with enormous fires, while the discharge of fowling-pieces, carbines, pistols, and revolvers was enough to worry any nervous old lady out of her seven senses. But I don't suppose there were many nervous old ladies on Bendigo at that time; it was not exactly the place for such people. Except on a bright moonlight night, it was scarcely safe to be abroad after dusk. One was apt to tumble down miners' shafts, or, still worse, to stumble unintentionally against a tent, when a ferocious bull-dog would rush out and pin you by the throat,

or perhaps the owner would idly fire a random bullet through the canvas of his frail dwelling, as a hint that you had better make yourself scarce.

One moonlight night, Mr. Skilbeck invited me to go out with him on a 'possuming expedition. As Tom Prince was away on business, Prawle stayed to look after the Coggeshall Store, while Toby Wheeler came over to Skilbeck's tent to keep an eye on Banbury.

"Not as I fancy old Banbury will stir," observed Mr. Skilbeck. "I don't believe he'd take his nose out of the tent, if a field of clover was to grow up in the night within a hundred yards of him."

"Why do you call him Banbury, Mr. Skilbeck?"

"Don't you recollect the nursery rhyme, Master Stephen?—

' Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady ride on a white horse.'

My missus christened him Banbury on account of his colour."

Presently after this we started on our expedition, accompanied by Muzzler, who was in the most intense state of excitement. We had not got a mile away from the tent, when he began barking furiously at the foot of a tree.





CHAPTER XI.

A Night's 'possum-shooting—Muzzler in a terrible Predicament—Strange Disappearance of old Banbury—We begin Digging again—A Blow-fly's Complaint—Cedar Joe, the Bullock-driver—Finding Gold at last—The Twelve Cæsars—Their Fondness for Rum—Advantages of Teetotalism—Discovery of a wonderful Stone—Story-telling by the Family Fire—Sam Skilbeck's Anecdotes—Jemmy's Tale of the Sly German—My Tale of the Hot Pickles—Prawle's Story of the Greenwich Milliner—Reappearance of Banbury—How to make a Tent comfortable—Centipedes and Bulldog Ants—Attack on the Gold Escort—Alone in Tom Prince's Store—An Essex Man pays me a Visit—Trying on Boots—My Customer astonishes me—A Free Pass—Mr. Potter again—Skilbeck finds something extraordinary at the Bottom of an eighteen-foot Hole—How we hid away our Big Nugget—The Journey to Melbourne—Bailed Up!—The Big Damper—Safely lodged in the Bank—A Dust Storm—Old Prawle's Letter—Conclusion.

THERE must be an opossum there," said I.
"I don't see any," replied Mr. Skilbeck, as he peered among the branches, and then lowered his gun. "When Muzzler hasn't been out for some time, he barks at everything. Most likely what he saw was a native cat."

"What are native cats like?"

Instead of Mr. Skilbeck answering my question, Mr. Skilbeck's gun said "bang!" and something dropped at my feet.

It was a small creature, about the size and shape of a weasel, and covered with black spots.

"That's a native cat," observed Mr. Skilbeck. "Terrible noosances they be in a poultry-yard. They're worse than foxes in the old country. They carry off the chicks, and suck eggs by the dozen."

"What is a kangaroo-rat like?"

"It's a pretty little thing, just like a minniter [Mr. Skilbeck meant "miniature"] kangaroo. I wish I could shoot you one. When I was——"

Here Muzzler interrupted his master by barking with extraordinary fury at the foot of an aged and gigantic red gum-tree.

"There's a 'possum, there, and no mistake. I can tell that by the difference of his bark. It's what I call a hearnest bark—no make believe about it. Ha! there he is!"

Sam Skilbeck pointed up among the branches, which stood out black and clear in the bright moonlight, and on one of the limbs I saw something which looked like a wen or excrescence.

"D'ye see him creeping along? I'll give you the first shot, Master Stephen. It's a light gun and a light charge, so you needn't fear its kicking."

Bang!

"Good. You've touched him." Sam Skilbeck took the gun, and fired the second barrel. The opossum fell, but caught a branch with his tail, and hung suspended there. "They take a wonderful hold with their tails, do 'possums," observed Mr. Skilbeck. "I've sometimes fired a dozen

shots, and even then they wouldn't drop. They cling after they are stone dead."

Bang!

"That was right in his skull."

A moment after the opossum fell.

"Down, Muzzler!" shouted Sam. "Look at him," he said, holding him up by his tail; "he's a fine fellow."

The opossum was twice or thrice as long as a cat, with a cunning face and sharp-pointed nose, a very bushy tail, and a coat of the softest fur.

"You'll excuse me giving you a bit of advice, Master Stephen. If you riddle the skin, you spoil it. You should always aim at the head."

"I was only too pleased to hit him anywhere," I answered.

"Ay, but a true 'possum-hunter never aims except in the head. This skin and all we get to-night will go towards a rug I'm making for my grandmother down in Hertfordshire. Wonderful old lady she is, close on ninety, and reads her Bible without glasses. Such fur as this will keep her old bones warm in bed, eh?"

"And what do you do with the carcasses?"

"I biles them for Muzzler's dinner."

"Don't people ever eat them?"

"Some does. They taste too strong of peppermint to please me. I'd as lief eat a fox. But they say if you bury 'em in the earth for a few days, they come out quite sweet."

During the next hour little conversation took place, for we had excellent sport. Thirteen opossums fell to our gun, and I was quite proud when I brought down one at a single shot right through the head.

"I call that first-class, Master Stephen," cried Mr. Skil-

beck, approvingly; "but you must take notice that he is a young 'un, and not up to the tricks of the old hands. An old 'possum never shows you his head if he can help it, and always creeps along the upper side of a branch."

"How Prawle would enjoy this!" I observed.

"Ah! I'll bring Prawle out another night," replied Mr. Skilbeck, "but I don't expect he'll do much good with a gun. He's a young genelman with a wonderful gift of the gab, and I've mostly remarked that great talkers are bad sportsmen."

As we were returning homewards, bending under the weight of our spoils, we met with rather a singular adventure. Muzzler barked vehemently at the foot of a tree, and not content with this, forced his head into a hole at the root, which was no doubt the entrance to the opossum's dwelling-place. While Mr. Skilbeck and I were gazing anxiously upwards to see if we could discover our game, Muzzler's bark suddenly changed into a doleful whine.

"Hallo! Muzzler, what's the matter?" said Mr. Skilbeck.

We soon discovered what was the matter. The poor brute had got jammed in the narrow passage, and could neither go forwards nor backwards.

"Here's a job!" said Sam; "if we can't drag him out, I must cut him out with my clasp-knife."

While he was searching his pockets for his knife, I heard loud hiss close by me. I looked down and saw a black head protruded from the hole in the tree, close to Muzzler's tail. A moment after, a long body followed. It was the head and shoulders of a snake!

If I had had time for reflection, I should not have dared to do what I did. But I did not reflect, I seized the reptile

by its neck, and holding it firmly, exhibited it to Mr. Skilbeck.

"That's right," he observed, as coolly as if I had been holding his shot pouch. He then drew his knife, and cut the beast's head clean off at one blow.

"Now," he exclaimed, "I call that a plucky action. I didn't dare to tell you the risk you ran, or you might have let go and got bit. That's a diamond snake, one of the venomousest creatures that crawls. I hope he hain't bit Muzzler."

Mr. Skilbeck now carefully cut away some of the wood of the tree, and then taking his dog by the hind quarters, dragged him out by main force. It was quite a sight to see the gratitude of the poor brute; he licked our hands over and over again.

"I don't think he is any the worse," observed Muzzler's master. "As for this 'possum, we'll leave him till another night. It's time to be in bed and asleep."

On reaching home we found Toby Wheeler fast asleep, but no Banbury poking his white nose into the tent. "It's very strange," said Mr. Skilbeck; "I never before knew him act like this; he must have gone feeding on the ranges. He'll be back at daylight."

But when daylight came, no Banbury appeared, and though Mr. Skilbeck and his mates searched the country for miles around, no news could be obtained of him. Toby was a heavy sleeper, and had heard nobody prowling about the tent; but Mr. Skilbeck declared that Banbury must have been stolen, for that he would never stray away of his own accord for more than a few hours.

A few days after this Prawle's maimed fingers were pronounced by skilled surgeons, namely the party of good-natured Vandemonians, to be once more fit for duty; where-

upon we determined to recommence gold-digging. I was growing tired of shopkeeping,—it seemed an unnatural sort of life in the bush, and was glad to go back to the work for the sake of which we had visited Australia.

We scarcely knew Jemmy Wallington when he returned from Dead Dog Gully. His fair skin had been tanned brown, his cabbage-tree hat was battered, and the ribbon discoloured by the sun ; he looked like a regular old chum. He also brought with him four ounces of gold, his share of the profits, earned by no sudden stroke of good luck, but by steady and continuous hard work. Jemmy was now so much more experienced in gold-digging than either myself or Prawle, that we unanimously appointed him captain of the party, and I am bound to say that he did not abuse his position.

Under Jemmy's directions, which were approved by Sam Skilbeck, we now commenced sinking a shaft of our own in entirely new ground. It was pretty severe work, for the weather was oppressively hot, and old Prawle declared about twenty times a day that his back was broken. "My back is as long as both of yours put together," he used to say, "so no wonder I feel it more !" The truth is that Prawle, though one of the most active, handy fellows in the world, did not relish hard, steady work. However, he took it very good-naturedly, and never lost his temper, not even when I carelessly let a bucket go, which hit him on the head. "I say," he shouted, "don't do that again, or I shall kick the bucket."

"Gettng" was, I think, the most laborious work, as the "getter" was obliged to sit crouching as if his legs were in a mediæval instrument of torture—"the scavenger's daughter." I believe it is called—and Prawle, being long in the legs, was always having the cramp, or assuring us that he

had enough pins and needles in his feet to stock a haberdasher's shop. But the "getter" had some advantages, he was shaded from the fierce rays of the sun, and he was not much worried by the flies, though Prawle declared that there was one especial blow-fly of gigantic proportions which had taken an especial fancy to himself, and was always buzzing her maternal grievances into his ear, while he was down in the hole. If Prawle may be believed, this is how she used to talk :—

"I always endeavour, Mr. P., to give my children the best possible education ; but my efforts are frequently defeated. Only yesterday I deposited a healthy and thriving family of five-and-forty under the flap of a mutton-chop, but your meddling cook, Jemmy Wallington, must needs scrape all but four off with a table-knife ; and those four were roasted and eaten by you. I hope you enjoyed them. Buz—buz—buz !"

At last we bottomed our hole. Mr. Skilbeck came to look at it, and pronounced it to have been dug in a fairly workmanlike manner. He washed a few handfuls of the "dirt," and found a speck of gold, which he considered a good sign. The gold-bearing stratum must be exceedingly rich for the precious metal to show in any quantity. We had still a great many difficulties to contend with ; for when we had tunnelled to some distance, and had accumulated a pile of wash-dirt as big as our tent, we had no water to wash up with. The nearest water fit for such a purpose was now two miles off. How we wished that we had not sold Topsy ! But it was of no use regretting past follies ; so we made a bargain with an old bullock-driver that we should have the use of himself, his team of bullocks, and his dray, for the moderate sum of three ounces of gold, or about ten pounds sterling per day. We looked forward with intense anxiety

to the results of the first day's washing. We only obtained two ounces and a half; so that, after all our labour, we actually had to pay the bullock-driver out of our own pockets. "Come, mates," he said, "I don't want to be hard on you,—give me half shares, and I won't grumble." We consulted Mr. Skilbeck on this point. "Don't you make any such bargain," he said, "for more than a few days." The next day we got three ounces, then only an ounce, at which "Cedar Joe"—so called because he had been a cedar-sawyer on the Sydney side—began to grumble; but the day after, we got four ounces, then six ounces, and then eleven ounces! We were delighted that our contract was only for a week. But that old rascal, Cedar Joe, vexed at losing the profits he had expected, went and spread exaggerated reports of our success, whereupon a party a dozen strong—great, big, bullying fellows,—came and sunk shafts all around us, and drove on every side into our tunnels. And now I will tell you a curious anecdote, which illustrates the indirect advantages of teetotalism when you are on the gold mines. This rowdy party of twelve—Prawle christened them the twelve Cæsars, because they were ready to *seize* everything they could lay their hands on—were always knocking off work for the sake of obtaining strong drink; for though the sale of ardent spirits was strictly forbidden on the mines, under heavy penalties, there were plenty of sly grog-shops where liquor could be obtained. I remember that when Prawle was selling his "jump-up" ginger beer, diggers would often say, "Can't ye put any eye-water in it, mate?" Now Prawle and Jammy and I, and Mr. Skilbeck and his mates, never drank anything stronger than tea, yet we were all well and hearty. Now for my anecdote. We were driving a tunnel, let us say, in a northerly direction, the party in one of the opposition shafts

were driving in a southerly direction ; so that before long our galleries would join. There was, accordingly, a spirited race between us to see who could get most of the debatable territory that lay between. As they were men, while we were only lads, they could work much quicker than we could. I was down in the tunnel "getting," and I could distinctly hear the strokes of the opposition pick, which showed that our enemies were within a few feet of us. Presently the sound of the opposition pick ceased. I was curious to know the reason, so I came out under the mouth of our shaft, and asked Prawle why the twelve Cæsars had knocked off work. "Because," he replied, whispering down the shaft, "because Caligula"—this was a truculent-looking scoundrel with a black eye—"because Caligula has just brought a bottle of rum, and Nero and Vespasian have gone to help him drink it."

On hearing this news, I set to work again, tunnelling harder than ever. In about an hour's time my pick seemed to enter the wall of stiff clay with extraordinary ease. I drew it out, and saw a faint ray of daylight beyond. I had driven into the tunnel of the Imperial party—the wall of clay was only a few inches thick ! I now set to work to dislodge a stone which obstructed the passage. I was rather surprised to see the stone, for I had hitherto met with none at this depth—I had encountered nothing but tough, marly clay. I struck my pick against the stone, and it felt as if it made a dent in it. A moment later I perceived that the stone was of a yellowish colour ! I now grew so excited that I almost lost my head ; but I worked away, and in five minutes had the supposed stone in my hands. It was of a strange shape, more like a dumb-bell than anything else I could think of. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses ; but there

was no mistake about it, *it was a large nugget of pure gold!* Carefully concealing it in the breast of my jersey, I bade Prawle lower the rope, for that I wanted to come up.

"You look pretty warm, Stephen," he said; "but you don't mean to say you're tired?"

"Yes, I am; I want a spell. I have driven right into the Cæsars' camp."

"Hurrah!" added Jemmy. "Then we've won the battle of Philippi. Which was it, Philippi or Actium, Stephen?"

"I can't tell you," I whispered in a low tone; "but if you and Prawle will sit down behind this bank of earth, I'll show you the spoils of the victory."

I leave you to conceive the astonishment and delight of my companions. In the course of the evening the nugget was weighed in Tom Prince's grocery-scales: it was far beyond the powers of his gold-weighing apparatus—and was pronounced to weigh eighteen pounds troy! It was worth, at the price then current on Bendigo, about £700. Now, on examining this nugget there was plainly discernible the mark of a pick-axe on the side *opposite to that* from which I had attacked it, clearly showing that it was actually under the very nose of our enemy Vespasian; and that if he had not been seduced away by that fatal bottle of rum, in two minutes more the nugget would have become the property of himself and his mates!

When Tom Prince heard this, he bade us say nothing about the exact spot where we found the nugget, "for," said he, "those fellows are capable of threatening to murder you, unless you hand it over to them." Prudent Tom Prince also advised that we should keep the story of the discovery of the nugget a close secret from everybody, even from our

dear friend Sam Skillbeck ; “ for,” said he, “ Sam is fond of gossiping by the fire when work is done, and the news wou’d be soon all over the gully.”

In the course of the next day we found three other nuggets near the same spot, but their size was nothing in comparison,—they might altogether make our booty worth £800. The wash-dirt from this part of the hole was very rich, and altogether yielded us about £200. So here were we three young fellows, whose united ages only amounted to about forty-six, worth a thousand pounds sterling ! We could scarcely realize our good fortune ; and were surprised to find that we did not feel a bit happier than before this piece of luck happened to us ; for then we lay down at night and slept like tops ; now we were always fancying that bushrangers had broken into Tom Prince’s tent, where our treasure was deposited.

“ I shall never feel easy,” said old Prawle quite seriously,—for, under the influence of wealth, his capacity for joking had deserted him, “ till that gold is safe in one of the Melbourne banks.” And he advised that, till we were ready to go down to Melbourne—for we did not like to abandon our profitable hole as long as there was a pound of washable dirt left—he advised that, till that time, we should sleep by turns in Tom Prince’s tent, by way of alleviating our anxieties.

I must now turn for a while to other subjects. We had all abstained, though with some pain and difficulty, from telling our beloved friend Sam Skillbeck about the big nuggets ; but he knew that we had done well with our wash-dirt. We were standing one evening round the family fire, as we called it—a huge mass of logs, which was replenished every day, and had not been extinguished since the last thunderstorm. The warmth of this fire was gene-

rally enjoyable after nightfall; for though the days were scorching hot, the nights were often extraordinarily cold, colder even than summer nights are, in England. Sam Skilbeck was smoking his pipe; and Prawle, who also had lately taken to that pernicious habit, was puffing away opposite to him. Sam was in a particularly talkative humour, and was chatting away, as the Latin proverb has it, *De omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*—about everything in the world, and something else into the bargain.

“How the country has changed since I first come into it twelve year ago! Melbourne was a poor little place then, no bigger, and nearly as dead-alive, as my native village in Hertfordshire. The stumps of the old forest trees were still standing in Collins-street, and hundreds of black fellows used to camp out in Richmond Paddock. Who’d ever ha’ thought there was all this riches lying buried in the bowels of the earth! In those days people talked of nothing but bullocks and jumbucks.”

“What are jumbucks?” asked Jemmy.

“It’s the black fellows’ word for sheep. And, do you know, about five year back, me and a party of overlanders, as were bringing a mob of cattle down from Deniliquin, on the Murray, camped out on this very Bendigo gold-field. The overseer of the run (I dare say he’s here still) asked us if we’d mind staying a day, and help him put up a wool-shed. We agreed, and I recollect we sunk the posts three or four feet into the ground. Now that wool-shed stood in the middle of Golden Gully, the very richest part of the Bendigo; and if we’d only known it, our picks and shovels were within a few inches of enough gold to buy all the wool that would be stored in that shed for years and years.”

“It certainly seems strange,” I said, “that the gold was not sooner discovered.”

"Why, you see," replied Mr. Skilbeck, "until California broke out, nobody had any more idea of looking for gold in the Australian bush than they had of hunting there for elephants. Now everybody keeps a bright look-out, just like a retired tradesman I once know'd as lived in the Borough. You know the Borough, Mr. Prawle?"

"Rather so. And what did the retired tradesman do?"

"Well, he did nothing, 'cause he had got plenty of money; so he used to saunter along the streets, sweeping the roadway in front of him with his eyes, and, if you'll believe me, in about thirty years that man picked up a wonderful lot of things: I recollect a pocket-comb, a tailor's pattern-book, a thimble, to say nothing of three five-pound notes—which proved arterwards to be Bank of Elegance—wrapped in a clean pocketankercher. It's the same with gold-digging, everybody has his eyes open nowadays. Why, look at what happened on the Sydney side. There was Dr. Thingumbob, as had a black fellow for a groom; this black fellow had ridden along one particular road hundreds of times, and had continually passed a big quartz stone that juttet out of the bank at the side of the road. But when Hargreaves came over from California, and gold began to be discovered in New South Wales, Blackey pricks up his ears, goes and looks close into this quartz rock, and finds that it's a magnificent specimen,* weighing upwards of a hundredweight."

"Don't you suppose, Mr. Skilbeck," I asked, "that anybody knew of the gold in New South Wales till Mr. Hargreaves came there?"

* The word "specimen" is used by the gold-diggers to denote a conglomerate of quartz and gold; "nugget" implies a pure lump of the precious metal.

"Ah! There's a tale hangs by that too. There was Cranky Isaac, a shepherd up in the Blue Mountains, an old grey-headed chap, as had been lagged for bread-rioting ever so many years ago, before the Battle of Waterloo. I've heard my grandmother talk of it: the rioters used to go about with a quartern loaf on a pole, dipped in sheep's blood, and the cry was, 'Bread or Blood.' Well, this Cranky Isaac came into Sydney once a year, and while there, drank the best of liquors, and paid his score with bits of raw gold. This came to the ears of the police; he was took up, and charged with robbery. He denied being a thief; vowed that he had never in his life wronged a man of a halfpenny; and insisted on being brought before the Governor privately. Well, and what does the Governor do? Why, orders him to be set at liberty, and, it is said, paid him a pension to the day of his death."

"Why did he pay him a pension?" asked Prawle.

"To keep Cranky's mouth shut. He told the Governor where he had got the gold. The Governor feared that if the truth was known, all the convicts would break loose; so he bribed him to say nothing about it. Now then, I think I have talked enough for the present, so let's hear a tale from one of you young gentlemen."

"Prawle! Prawle!" cried Jemmy and I.

"No, no," said Prawle; "*Juniorcs priores*. Let's begin with the youngest — Master Stephen."

"I don't know anything," I said.

"Don't know anything! Why, tell Sam and Jemmy the story of the pickles. Look how he's blushing! He has never dared to let it out."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," I answered. "Well, you must know that when I was shop-boy to Mr. Tom Prince, there were two diggers, who lived a little way down the

gully, who were excellent customers. They were very fond of eating: they spent all their money on delicacies; and every day came to the store for rashers of bacon, pots of marmalade, dried fish, and such-like luxuries. They were also fond of pickles, and used to eat a bottle of mixed pickles between them at a sitting. One day one of them came as usual for a bottle of pickles; I could not find a bottle on the counter; Tom Prince was out; so I opened a fresh case, and handed one to him. An hour after, one of the diggers came over with a very red face, and made signs to Prawle for some ginger beer. He drank a glass, made signs for another, then another, and then another, till he had had six glasses: he then found his tongue.

“ ‘You’ve nearly murdered me,’ he gasped, ‘and you’ve quite murdered my mate. Come and see him, and fetch some physic with you.’ ”

“ We found the poor fellow stretched on his back, looking uncommonly bad; but Prawle gradually brought him round. I had by mistake given them hot West India pickles, and the fellows had devoured a whole bottle! Now then, Jemmy, it’s your turn.”

“ I haven’t got a story of my own, so I must tell one that Toby Wheeler told me. Did you ever hear of Chouser’s Gully, Mr. Skilbeck?”

“ No, I can’t say as ever I did. That’s a rum name to give a gully.”

“ Yes, it is; and that’s why I tell you the story. Not long ago there was a German called Hartmann, who was travelling with a team of bullocks and a waggon-load of stores, in search of some place where he might put up his tent and begin business. He came to a certain gully, a beautiful spot. There was plenty of timber, a stream of

sweet water, and excellent feed for the cattle. He longed to settle there; but he hesitated, because there were only half a dozen parties at work, and none of them appeared to be doing much good. At length his German love for comfort prevailed; so he pitched his tent on this pretty little gold-field. But mining there grew more and more unprofitable. First one party went away, then another, till at last no one was left except two brothers—tall, thin, lantern-jawed fellows, with appetites like cormorants. For weeks past they had been so unlucky, that they never got enough to eat. One day they came to the storekeeper, saying that they also must leave, and begging him to give them a little flour and sugar on credit.

“‘How shall I ever see you again?’ demanded Mr. Hartmann. ‘Already you owe me four pounds. Yours is a very bad hole, is it so?’

“‘A regular duffer,’ replied the brothers.

“‘Couldn’t it be made a good hole?’

“‘I don’t see how.’

“‘You wait till to-morrow morning. Go there at daylight.’

“At daylight one of the brothers descended the shaft, and, wonderful to tell, found at the bottom a piece of bacon, a Dutch cheese, and a two-stone bag of flour.

“‘Is the hole better now?’ asked Mr. Hartmann.

“‘Much better,’ answered the brothers.

“‘Good. Perhaps it will go on improving. Meantime,’ says old Hartmann, winking his eye, ‘you can go round the country and tell the people how rich our soil is here.’

“The brothers did so. Next day they went down the shaft again, and found a quarter-chest of tea, a bag of sugar, and a bottle of Hollands.

" 'How do you like the hole?' asked Mr. Hartmann.

" 'Better than ever,' answered the brothers.

"It was reported all over the district that a wonderful find had taken place on this gully. Diggers flocked there by the hundred, sank numbers of fresh holes, and Mr. Hartmann did a roaring trade.

"There had not been enough hands until now to prospect the gully properly. Gold was now discovered in abundance, and everybody was in high spirits. The story of Hartmann's trickery got wind, but as all the diggers had profited by it, they thought no worse of him, except that they christened the scene of his operations 'Chouser's Gully.'"

"Bravo, Jemmy!" cried Prawle. "Now, then, it's my turn. I believe Jemmy and Stephen have heard my story before, but Sam Skilbeck hasn't; so here goes:—In my native town of Greenwich there was a young man named Branfield, who fell in love with a milliner, a very pretty girl at a shop in Stockwell-street. His relations were people who held their heads very high, and when he married her they would have nothing to say to him. Branfield became disgusted, and as he had five hundred pounds of his own he determined to emigrate to Australia, and become a sheep-farmer. He got to Melbourne just as the diggings had broken out; all the country was in a state of confusion, and no shepherds were to be had for love or money. He was at his wits' end what to do; but Mrs. Branfield was as clever as she was pretty, and she said—

" 'My dear, let us open a milliner's shop. We can stock it, to begin with, with my new dresses and bonnets.'

"The shop was opened, and she soon became the most fashionable milliner in Melbourne. I went to call on

Branfield on the strength of being a fellow-townsmen. He was civil enough, but far too busy to ask me to dine with him. While I was waiting in the shop a digger came in with his sweetheart, as rough a looking couple as you could pick out of Big Bourke-street. The lady began to order all the most expensive things she could think of; ribbons, lace, satin, silks, nothing came amiss to her. At last the digger got tired, he yawned half a dozen times, and said—

“ ‘Polly, I can’t stand this any longer. You’ll find me in the Puddlers’ Arms.’

“ Then turning to Branfield, he asked the price of a cheval glass which stood in the shop.

“ ‘That is not for sale,’ answered Branfield, smiling, ‘that’s for the convenience of our customers.’

“ ‘But I suppose,’ said the digger, with an oath, ‘you’d sell it if I gave you enough for it? How much do you want?’

“ ‘Well,’ says Branfield, ‘I couldn’t replace that glass for less than eighty pounds.’

“ ‘Here you are,’ cried the digger, shoving a roll of notes into my lucky townsman’s hand; ‘and mind—rig Polly out like a duchess.’

“ Now at the further end of the shop there was a very plainly-dressed lady talking to Mrs. Branfield about a bonnet. Just as the digger was about to leave, we heard her say, ‘I’m afraid I can’t afford that. It’s too dear.’

“ ‘Too dear, Marm!’ exclaimed the digger, ‘not a bit of it. Here, I’ll pay for the bonnet, and if there’s any change out of that,’ handing Mrs. Branfield a bank note, ‘sling it over to Polly.’

“ ‘Do you know who that was?’ said Mr. Branfield to Polly, after the lady had left.

" 'No, I don't. 'She ain't got much 'tin to boast of, I' fancy.'

" 'She is the wife of the Governor of Victoria.'

" 'I say,' exclaimed Mr. Skilbeck, as soon as he had finished laughing at Prawle's story, "what's that moving over yonder? I fancy I hear a horse's feet, but this here fire-light dazzles my eyes."

" 'I see a horse,' answered Prawle; "a white horse with a saddle and bridle on."

" 'Why what wonderful eyes you've got!' " observed Mr. Skilbeck. "I can scarcely see anything but a sort of whitish figure. How came you to have such eyes?"

" 'When I was a baby,' answered Prawle, gravely, "our tom-cat was in the habit of sitting under the bed. As I lay in my cradle he used to stare at me, and I stared back at him. His eyes shone like two live coals, and I suppose mine caught the reflection. Why, Sam," cried Prawle, interrupting himself, "the horse has gone and lain down in front of your tent! "

At these words we all rose and crossed hastily over to Mr. Skilbeck's tent. Yes, sure enough, there was a white horse, and as we drew near he got up, neighed, and then came and rubbed his nose against Sam's shoulder.

" 'If it isn't Banbury, it's Banbury's ghost!' " gasped out that gentleman. "Why, Banbury, old man, where ever have ye been; and how came you with a saddle on your back, and a bridle on your neck? You left me with neither saddle nor bridle."

" 'See! Mr. Silbeck,' said I, "the rein is broken."

" 'Ay, so it is. Now, I'll warrant Banbury has been tied up somewhere and has broken away, and come home.

Can't you speak, Banbury, and tell us what has happened to ye?"

Banbury did not speak, but he put his head into an empty bucket as a hint that he was thirsty. He was soon supplied with a plentiful drink of water; Skilbeck would rather have had no tea for breakfast than let his favourite be stinted. His saddle and bridle were then taken off, he received a good rubbing down, and finished the evening by dipping his nose into a bag of oats.

Next morning Mr. Skilbeck came over to us at breakfast-time with a very surprised expression on his face.

"I was grumbling and growling," he said, "this morning, and reckoning that with one loss and another I was no better off than when I came on the Bendigo. But I've had a windfall since then. Just now I took up that saddle that Banbury brought in last night, and began to look at it. The saddle was quite new, yet there was a hole cut in the pad which had been sown up again. 'That's queer,' says I, 'I'll unrip you.' So I unripped it, and I found stowed away inside between thirty and forty ounces of gold in half a dozen different packets. See, there's writing on them," he continued, handing a packet to Prawle.

Prawle read aloud as follows:—

"Sample of gold from Three-mile Creek, Nov. 14th, 18—. Found on a schoolmaster. Gave no trouble. 'Barkers' not needed."

Another ran thus:—

"Sample of gold from Saw-pit Gully, Nov. 15th, 18—. Found on three diggers. Drunk and obstinate. Left them tied to three trees as a warning."

"I say, Banbury," exclaimed Mr. Skilbeck, as he went

and fondled his horse's ears, "you've been carrying a nice sort of genelman on your back, haven't you?"

I have already made a few remarks on tent life; but I should like, before wishing my readers farewell, to say a little more on the same subject. If you are perpetually shifting about from place to place, it is almost impossible to make a tent a very comfortable dwelling: in such cases it is advisable to carry a sheet of mackintosh cloth to spread on the ground under you at night, as it keeps the damp from striking upwards, and saves the traveller from the danger of rheumatism.

But when you are settled in one spot, as we were on Iron Bark Gully, it only needs a little activity and handiness to make yourself pretty snug and cosy; but some fellows are so lazy and, if I may use the expression, so piggish, that they won't take the least trouble even for their own benefit. I have seen men—men, too, of good birth and breeding, and accustomed in England to every luxury—who were content to creep night after night into their blankets spread on the bare earth, and who used to cut up their meat with a pocket-knife, holding the frying-pan on their knees by way of a plate. We preferred to do things in a more civilized style.

First, with regard to the tent itself: we bought a horse-load of rough slabs from a bush-splitter, built them up to a height of four feet from the ground, and then placed our tent on top of them, thereby gaining a greater elevation of roof, and having a solid wall, which prevented the incursions of native cats. We bought a large sheet of canvas, and stretched it over the top of the tent at a distance of about two feet. This is called a "fly," and adds greatly to the coolness of the tent, especially if a covering of green

boughs is placed between the two roofs: even then the tent was often insufferably hot. Tom Prince lent us a thermometer. I have seen it as high inside the tent as 120 degrees, while at night perhaps it would descend to 45 degrees, making us glad to heap all the clothes we could muster on to our beds.

Talking of beds, we manufactured three very simple and excellent bedsteads. For each of these bedsteads, four small posts were driven into the ground in the form of an oblong square; the posts were connected together by four strips of wood, and then a flour sack cut open was stretched over all, and fastened with tin tacks. For beds we bought a few yards of calico, made the calico into large bags, and stuffed them with fern-leaves, putting in a few leaves of the musk-tree, which affords an agreeable scent, and is said to keep insects away. I never wish to sleep on a sweeter-smelling or more elastic bed.

But our greatest triumph, of which Jemmy Wallington, who was chief carpenter, was immensely proud, was our table. It was rather rough and uneven, but, as its legs were imbedded in the ground, it could not waggle about. Then we had three stools, sawn from a round log of wood. For shelves, sheets of bark were hung on strings round the tent. On these we kept our cooking implements and other utensils.

If you had seen us on a Sunday evening, with our lamp lighted—it was made of surplus fat poured into a pannikin, with a twisted piece of rag for a wick—Prawle and I reading books, and Jemmy at the table writing a letter to his mother in Huddersfield, you would have said we were quite a civilized trio of diggers. The real charm of this life was that there was never any idle time. When our mining work

was over, there were clothes to wash, dampers to make, stores to buy, carpentering jobs to be done : there was always something to keep us employed.

A few more words about insects. We were extremely lucky in Iron Bark Gully with respect to mosquitoes. They troubled us very little, I think because the situation was dry and elevated ; but in low swampy places they are a great torment. As far as my experience goes, I found them worse in the middle of the town of Melbourne than anywhere else. Prawle was once bitten on the foot by a tarantula spider, as he was getting out of bed. The foot swelled, and became very painful, and for several days he could only wear an easy old slipper ; but before long the swelling subsided and disappeared. One day I was carrying pieces of wood from a deserted "shanty" which stood near our tent. My arms were bared to the shoulder : I felt something on one of them ; looked over my shoulder, and saw an immense centipede, as long and as thick as my finger, crawling on my naked flesh. I snipped him off with my finger and thumb before he had time to do any mischief.

On another evening, I was alone in the tent writing a letter, when I saw a great bull-dog ant on the table. These rascals are fully an inch long, with a dreadful sting and a formidable pair of nippers. I held out my pen to him, and he instantly seized it between his forceps. I then crushed him, and went on writing. But presently I saw another bull-dog on the table ; then another, and another. I got up in a great fright, and found that a whole regiment of them were climbing up the leg of the table. Sam Skilbeck was our constant resource in any difficulty, so I called him in.

"Ah!" he said, "you've put up your tent over a bull-dog's nest. They don't care for sweets, but they've an uncommon relish for a bit of meat. If you can't find the nest you'll have to shift your tent."

We did not sleep very comfortably that night, fearing that we should be stung, but no such misfortune befell us. In the morning, after a careful search, we found the entrance to the nest. There was no heap of earth by which to know it, merely two or three small round holes in the ground; but Mr. Skilbeck said he was sure of it, and just then a rash young bull-dog settled the question by showing his nose at the hall-door.

"How are we to get rid of them?" we asked.

"You must make a kittle of water biling hot, and pour it down their hole two or three times a day. Tom Prince will lend you a kittle. It's more handy than a billy, on account of the spout."

As we had now got everything that was worth getting out of our claim, we made preparations for going to Melbourne, for we really deserved a holiday. Mr. Skilbeck and his mates also talked of going away. A new gold-field was said to have been discovered at Mount Morang, fifty miles off in a northerly direction; and now that they had recovered Banbury, they proposed packing up their traps and trying their luck there. As for ourselves, our treasure, which lay hidden beneath the boards of Tom Prince's store, gave us a world of anxiety.

You may wonder why we did not send it down by the Government escort which had lately been established, and which every week carried to Melbourne a large amount of the precious metal. The light waggon which contained the gold was drawn by four smart horses, which were changed

at regular stages, and was guarded by a dozen or more men, fully armed and mounted on horseback. But just at this time we felt no confidence in the escort.

Within a day or two after the discovery of our big nugget, we heard the news of a daring yet dastardly outrage which had been committed within fifty miles of Bendigo. A branch escort, bringing gold from another mining district, was cantering leisurely through the bush. Their attention was attracted by a rude construction of logs and bark,—a sort of breastwork, resembling a native mi-mi, or hut. Before, however, they had had time to remark upon it, a murderous fire was poured forth from behind the breastwork. Several of the troopers fell wounded from their horses, while a party of brigands rushed out, cut the traces of the waggon-horses, and endeavoured to carry away the contents of the waggon. By this time, however, the troopers had rallied; they opened fire on the enemy, who retired without accomplishing their object, leaving two or three of their number on the field. This party of marauders, supposed to be headed by the redoubtable Maconochie, was still at large, and every week it was expected that the Bendigo escort would be massacred for the sake of their valuable freight. We therefore made up our minds that we would carry our gold to Melbourne ourselves, without asking any other assistance.

At this time, when the town of Melbourne was swarming with criminals, and when the police were powerless, so that it was scarcely safe to venture out after dark—there was no gas in those days,—and when all the main avenues, to the diggings were infested with footpads and mounted highwaymen, the diggings themselves were remarkably free from crime. As for petty robberies, they were almost unknown.

Day after day miners left their tools, their cradles and tubs, in their claim, and no one ventured to run off with them. I never heard, during our stay there, of an attempt to rob a tent for the sake of the gold which might be in it; but then it must be remembered that the risk of burglary was very great. Many men kept fierce dogs, and nearly everybody had firearms within reach. I mention these facts in order that the reader may clearly understand that the adventure which I am about to relate was by no means a common occurrence, but of a very exceptional character.

It was our last night on the Bendigo, for we intended to start for Melbourne on the following evening just before sunset. Our purpose was to walk during the cool of the night, and rest during the scorching heat of the day. Prawle and Jemmy were busy at our tent preparing for departure, while I was at the Coggeshall Store, keeping Tom Prince company, and watching over the safety of our nuggets. Tom was sorry we were going, for he had hitherto been unable to find any person of good character willing to act as his assistant. About eight o'clock he said to me, "You don't mind staying here alone for an hour or so, do you, Stephen?"

"Certainly not. I've often been alone here before, and no one ever offered to hurt me."

"Because I want to go down to Bendigo.* This rush to

* The term Bendigo at that time was used in a special sense, to denote the central part of the diggings, just as we call a limited district of the metropolis the "City of London." I don't think "Bendigo" had originally any connection with the famous pugilist of that name; it was most likely a corruption of "Bandicoot." The flourishing town which has grown up on this site is called Sandhurst, and its old name is almost forgotten.

Mount Morang has almost cleared off my stock of boots ; so I must bring up a dozen pair on my back ; and I want to see a young fellow who has hurt himself digging, and wants a lighter occupation. Good-bye, I don't suppose you'll have any customers at this time of night."

The silver orb of the moon was just showing through the branches of the forest as Tom Prince took his departure. It was a delicious night—calm and cool without being chilly, so I sat down on a tree stump before the door of the tent. I had sat thus half an hour or more, when I saw the figure of a man sauntering slowly towards the tent. He was dressed in the ordinary mining costume—a blue serge blouse, cord trousers, and cabbage-tree hat, and he slouched along like a man who had been all his life accustomed to laborious occupations. As he drew near he stared at Tom Prince's canvas sign-board, and spelt it out with some difficulty.

"C O G, cog ; G E S, geese ; H A L L, hall. Why, that spells Coggeshall ! I say, young measter, be you from Essex, and be there any Essex ca'aves about here?"

"I hope I'm not an Essex calf," I answered, laughing. "The owner of this store, Tom Prince, is an Essex man."

"Ay, I thart he were Essex. I belong to that part myself, down in the mashes, towards Mersea Island. But I hope Tom Prince don't do business in the Coggeshall style."

"What style is that?"

"Why, a stupid style. Down in Essex they call a silly, clumsy job a Coggeshall job."

There was a sort of slow, rustic quaintness about this man which amused me greatly.

"You're not 'long from the old 'country?" I ventured to say.

"No, young measter; six weeks or thereabouts. It's too hot and dry to please me. I han't had a touch of the 'agur' since I landed, and that bain't healthy, be it? Now, is the measter in? because I want a pair of boots."

"He's not in; but perhaps I can find you a pair, if you'll take a seat on that stump."

I returned presently with all the boots we had remaining in stock.

"Jest you be good enough to pull the old 'uns off, young measter," said the rustic, stretching out his foot,—“my back-bone's stiff with the 'agur.'”

I was stooping down to unfasten the lace-up boot, when I suddenly found myself seized by the collar, while a cold, metallic substance was pressed to my forehead. I was in the grasp of the man on the stump, and he was holding a revolver to my head! The figure remained without change; but the countrified drawl had entirely disappeared. The next words which I heard were uttered in the sharp decisive accents of a well-educated man.

"Make no noise, my little man, or I shall be forced to shoot you. Do what I want, and I won't hurt you. Will you promise to stay here and make no outcry if I release you?"

"I will, Captain Maconochie." I remembered the peremptory commanding voice of the bandit captain.

"Ha! you recollect me, do you, you young rascal? Well, I recollect you too. Now, how soon will this Tom Prince return?"

"Not for half an hour, I think."

"You are sure?"

"I cannot be quite sure ; but he has gone to the Camp on business."

"Remember," said the Captain significantly, "any attempt to betray me means instant death. Come inside, I want to speak to you."

There was a mixture of softness and severity in the voice of this extraordinary man, which seemed to compel obedience. There was nothing truculent in his aspect. His features would have been handsome, if they had not been rendered coarse by dissipation and exposure. Yet he was emphatically a man of blood—not cruel, perhaps, for cruelty's sake, but always prepared to inflict wounds or death, if he could not otherwise attain his object. I did not then know, but I afterwards heard, that it was he who planned and executed the cowardly attack on the escort.

Captain Maconochie sprang nimbly on to our store-counter, and, taking me by the shoulders, made me stand in front of him.

"Now," said he, "I owe a good turn already to your party, especially to that punchy little warrior, Señor what's his name. If he had not lassoed friend Potter, friend Potter would have conducted me to the inside of a gaol. I'm not pleased with friend Potter. When I took him into my company he was half-starved ; I clothed him and fed him ; yet he tried to betray me, and he is still on my track ; that is why I am here to-night. You must hide me in this tent. They will never suspect a respectable fellow like Tom Prince of harbouring a bushranger. Will you do what I ask ?"

"How can I refuse you, Captain Maconochie? I am at your mercy."

"Not altogether. I am a little at your mercy also. Supposing, when I am fast asleep and weary, you come and play the part of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite? Supposing you nail my skull to the floor with one of your tent-pegs?"

"Sisera did not carry a six-barrelled revolver, captain: You have that advantage over him. Besides, I should scorn to betray you. Whatever harm you have done to others, you have done none to me. You treated us boys with kindness."

"Can I trust you? You have a frank face and a truthful voice. Yes, I will trust you. Mind, not a word to Tom Prince, and I swear by Heaven not a hair of your head shall suffer injury. Let me see," said the captain, descending from the counter and peering about the inner compartment of the store with a candle in his hand—"let me see, I think beneath that bunk would be a snug place to lie. You sleep there, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And Tom Prince?"

"In the front part of the tent."

"Good." With this single word the robber made preparations for lying down.

You may conceive the excited state of my feelings when I tell you that underneath the spot which he had selected all our treasure lay buried. Yet, I felt a sort of confidence that this man, even if he knew of our hoard, would not touch it. And I even had the impudence to ask him a favour.

"Captain Maconochie," I said, "before you creep under

my bed, will you grant me a favour? Within a few days my mates and I propose taking a trip to Melbourne."

"Ah! take care, that *my* mates don't meet you on the road."

"It is for that very reason I venture to address you. Will you write something on a piece of paper, asking them to let us alone?"

"Willingly. But, likely enough, they won't respect my orders. Discipline is lax in the Australian colonies. Besides, there are other firms in existence which owe no allegiance to me. However, I will do it. Quick, give me pen, ink, and paper."

A few minutes afterwards Captain Maconochie handed me a document, written in a firm, clear hand, of which the following is a copy:—

"Bendigo, December 21st, 18—.

"To Members of the Maconochie Firm.

"The bearers of this paper, Stephen Scudamore, James Wallington, and John Prawle, have done me good service. Let them pass without examination, for one month from this date.

"(Signed) HECTOR MACONOCHIE."

He then crept beneath my bunk, and covered himself with a blanket. Shortly afterwards, Tom Prince returned, panting under a bag full of heavy diggers' boots.

"Done any business?" he asked.

"A man called about a pair of boots, but he bought none."

"Ah! let us hope he'll come again in the morning. I'm dead beat. I shall go to bed."

I prepared to follow his example, though, as you may

suppose, I didn't expect to sleep much with such a formidable character beneath me. I was just about to get into bed, when I was dreadfully startled to feel the captain's hand on my foot. I stooped down and whispered, "What is it?"

"Does Tom Prince suspect anything?"

"Nothing whatever."

He had scarcely spoken, when we heard footsteps outside—the footsteps of more than one person. The footsteps went round to the front of the tent, and then I heard a voice say,—

"Hallo, there! Is this Mr. Prince's store?"

"Yes, and my name is Thomas Prince. What do you want? I'm in bed."

"I want to speak to you. I'm a superintendent of police."

"All right. In half a minute I'll unfasten the door."

I could hear Tom Prince through the thin canvas wall which divided the store into two apartments, striking a light, and cocking his revolver. I could also hear Captain Macnochie performing the latter operation underneath me, and I did not feel very easy in my mind.

"Good evening, Mr. Prince," said the constable, as he entered. "You know me, I believe?"

"Oh, yes! you're Superintendent Ramsay. You must excuse us storekeepers for being so suspicious. What's the matter, Mr. Ramsay?"

"Well, I've got a party outside—come in, Dick Potter—who does a little work in our line occasionally. He has got information that——"

I could not hear what followed, for the speaker sank his voice to a whisper, but presently Tom Prince said,—

"Bless me! Maconochie! you don't say so!"

"Yes," replied the harsh tones of Dick Potter, "I've certain information that he means to ask you to shelter him to-night. I thought he'd have been here by this time."

Here Captain Maconochie, beneath my bed, muttered audibly, "Are they all turning traitors? I thought, if I could trust any one, I could trust Nat the Weaver."

"Yes," continued Mr. Potter, "I thought the captain would have been here before this. You're sure nobody has come in, Mr. Prince?"

"Nobody. My store has never been left a moment unguarded."

"Shall we question the boy?" asked the constable.

"I wouldn't disturb him," answered Prince, "I dare say he is fast asleep by this time."

"Now, I'll tell you what we'd better do, Mr. Ramsay," said Dick Potter. "It won't do for you to be seen about here, or you'll frighten the captain away. You go down to the bark hut, at the other end of the gully, and stop there with your mates till I call you. As soon as ever the captain comes, Tom Prince shall slip out and give you the office. I s'pose you'd rather take him alive than dead?"

"Oh! alive, certainly," answered the superintendent. "And where are you going to stay, Dick Potter?"

"Under the shadow of that big white gum-tree yonder. The moon now is high. It's as light as day. If anything as big as a bandicoot offers to enter the tent-door I shall see it."

After a little further conversation, the constable, and Dick Potter took their departure. More than half an hour now elapsed, to me a half-hour of the most painful suspense. At the end of that time, Captain Maconochie, who had hitherto

remained perfectly quiescent, pulled my bedclothes significantly. I sat up in bed, and bent my head down to hear what he had to say.

"I hear your friend Tom Prince snoring," he whispered. "Creep quietly out of bed, and see if he is asleep."

In obedience to his command I got out of bed, pushed aside the partition, and peeped in. As the front of the tent was open, the moonlight was streaming in, and I could see everything distinctly. Tom Prince, wearied by his fatiguing walk, had fallen fast asleep on his bunk.

As soon as I had told the captain what I had seen, he emerged from beneath my bed, and cautiously glided into the front apartment of the tent, taking care to keep himself in the shadow. He took up the revolver which had fallen from Tom Prince's hand, and retreated again. For a moment I feared that he was going to murder the storekeeper, but he merely struck a match, and lighted a candle.

"I take away his pistol," he whispered, "to prevent accidents. Now then, can you find me a piece of stout cord?"

My fear returned at these words.

"Are you going to kill him, Captain Maconochie?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Kill him? Nonsense! Why should I kill Tom Prince? I don't mean to lay a finger on him."

"But the other one?" I said, pointing in the direction of the gum-tree.

"You mean Dick Potter?"

"Yes."

"I am going to give him a lesson. Quick, hand me the cord."

I still hesitated. "You won't murder him, poor wretch?"

Captain Maconochie grasped my arm. "My young friend," he said sternly, "you must not interfere with my business arrangements." He paused, and drew a glittering bowie-knife from a sheath which hung beneath his serge shirt. "Give me the cord; I don't mean to kill Potter, though the reptile deserves it—I am going to take a leaf out of the little Mexican's book."

At this point I gave him a piece of cord.

"Now mind," he said, drawing the bowie-knife, "you must not stir from this spot, or wake Tom Prince, or utter a signal of any kind for half an hour. Disobey my orders at your peril. Tell Prince I'm sorry to damage his property. Good bye."

With these parting words, he cut a great gash in the canvas wall at the back of the tent, and leapt as nimbly through the aperture as Harlequin at a Christmas pantomime. For five minutes or more I stood listening breathlessly; but when I heard a faint stifled cry, I could keep silence no longer. I rushed into the front tent, and shook Tom Prince violently.

"Hollo, boy," he exclaimed, sleepily, "what's the matter?"

I hurriedly told him the news, and said that I feared Dick Potter had been murdered.

"Where's my revolver?"

"Maconochie has carried it off. Stay; no, here it is in this corner."

Tom Prince peered cautiously out from the tent door. As I had disobeyed the bushranger's injunctions, and might reasonably expect, if he saw me, to receive a bullet through my heart, we decided that it was better to wait where we were until daylight.

murder you,' he replied, 'but I'm going to drop you down the deepest shaft I can find, and you may thank your stars, traitor Dick, that the Bendigo sinkings are generally shallow.' And, as you see, gentlemen, the beggar kept his word. You don't know what I've gone through all these blessed hours. Cramps and bruises are nothing; death by slow starvation was what I expected. I've said every line out of the Prayer-book I could think of. I must give up the thief-catching business, gentlemen, I really must; it doesn't suit my health."

"What, and take to thieving again?" observed Superintendent Ramsay, with a grin.

"No, I mean to be a square cove* for the future, honour bright. As soon as I get the use of my limbs, I'll take the marrowbone stage for the Murrumbidgee River, and get a hutkeeper's berth."

My mates were much astonished to hear of my exciting adventures. Prawle declared that I had not behaved exactly as a law-abiding citizen should behave.

"I can see," he said, "that Stephen regarded Macnochie in the light of an ill-used hero of romance. He treated him as he might have treated a refugee royalist—one of those picturesque fellows you read about in Scott's novels. If I'd been in your place, I should have flown at his throat, as Muzzler flew at Sam Skilbeck."

"No, indeed, Prawle, you wouldn't. And you forget that I'm not so big as you."

"All things considered, I think Stephen behaved very pluckily," said Jemmy.

"Yes; but he gave his sympathies to the cause of law-

* Honest man.

lessness," rejoined Prawle. "Now that I have become a capitalist, you can't conceive the repugnance I feel towards persons who prey on the property of others. Come, let us take down the tent, and get ready for starting."

I should have felt offended if Prawle had really meant what he said; but there was a comic twinkle in his eye all the time that he was speaking, so that I was not deceived by the solemnity of his voice.

We purposed leaving our tent and tools with Tom Prince, as we meant to return to the diggings after a short holiday. We had no intention of encumbering ourselves with a tent on the road to town; indeed, as we had planned to travel by night and to sleep by day, we scarcely needed blankets.

An important question now arose. How should we carry our gold? We could not distribute it in equal portions among the party, because the greater part of it consisted of one nugget, and it seemed almost impossible to conceal such a big nugget so that, if we were searched by bush-rangers, it would escape observation. When I speak of a big nugget, you must not imagine anything of a very unwieldy size. Eighteen pounds weight of gold packs into a small space. Our nugget was about as big as the shank-bone of a leg of mutton. Tom Prince gave us some excellent advice on this point.

"Since I've been a storekeeper," he said, "I've been obliged to carry about a good deal of gold, and I've resorted to all sorts of dodges for concealing it. I shan't tell you what they were, because the closer such secrets are kept the better; but I can give you a hint about your big nugget. I don't want to frighten you, lads, but I can't

help telling you that there is a rumour going about that the sixteen-year-olds—so they call you—have made their fortunes; and you may depend on it that a scoundrel like that Potter keeps his eyes and ears open to all sorts of gossip. Have you baked any dampers yet as provision for the journey?”

“We thought of buying bread on the road,” answered Prawle.

“I wouldn’t, if I were you. Take your stores with you, and avoid the main road altogether. Now supposing you put your nuggets into some of your dough, and bake a separate cake for show and not for use, won’t that deceive the bushrangers?”

“It sounds a capital plan,” said Jemmy.

“It’ll make the dough dreadfully heavy,” observed I. “Fancy an eighteen-pound nugget inside a loaf!”

“If it makes the dough heavy,” answered Prawle, gravely, “you must add some German yeast.”

“Prawle’s remedy,” said I, “reminds me of the story of the man and his wife on a very stormy night. ‘My dear! my dear!’ she cried, trying to awake him in her alarm, ‘don’t you hear the wind?’ ‘Put a peppermint lozenge outside the window,’ he answered, lazily, ‘it’s an excellent thing for the wind.’”

“But remember one thing,” replied Tom Prince, “don’t hide away all your gold. Disappointed bushrangers are apt to treat people very cruelly. Last winter a carrier was travelling towards Ballarat; his dray got bogged near Mount Buninyong, so he went some distance into the bush to procure spars for the purpose of prizing his wheels out of the mud. He heard a low moaning sound, and found a man tied to a tree, almost dead with hunger and weariness.

He had been there three days, and the cords had cut into his wrists and ankles. Had it been summer time he would have been eaten alive by insects. By degrees he recovered, and told his story. He had hidden his gold under a false sole in his boots—he was a shoemaker by trade—and obstinately refused to disclose his secret, never believing that the villains would dare to treat him as they did. Now you young men are rich, you can afford to keep six or seven ounces of gold in your pockets, and, if you are bailed up, they will take that and let you go.”

“Do you advise us to carry firearms?” I asked.

“No,” answered Tom Prince. “In a tent firearms are of some use. Fellows think twice about attacking a place when they know there is an armed man inside; but on the road it’s altogether different. You can’t point your pistol at the head of every man you meet, and hold it there, can you?”

“Scarcely,” said Jemmy.

“Very well. Then, supposing you pick up a stranger or two as you travel along. You tell each other the news, and so on, when suddenly he claps a pistol to your head, and bids you hold your hands up. If you dare move your hands towards your holster you are a dead man. In a small party of two or three persons firearms actually do mischief, because they lead rogues to suppose that you are carrying something which is worth fighting for.”

The distance from Bendigo to Melbourne is about 110 miles, and we hoped to accomplish the journey in four or five days by walking perseveringly during the night and the cool hours of the day. I have heard of men doing the whole distance in two days; but then they were skilled

pedestrians ; we were only youngsters, and our time was not particularly valuable.

We were sorry to bid good-bye to Tom Prince, but still more sorry to part with Mr. Skilbeck, because, as he was going to Mount Morang, we did not know when we should see him again. But he delighted us by saying that he would go with us as far as the Carambong Creek.

"The old lady," he said, meaning thereby his young and blooming wife, "is bent on seeing me again before I goes off with this new rush : so I can't deny her. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if she comes round me, and either keeps me at the anvil at Carambong, or insists on going to Mount Morang. A female," observed Mr. Skilbeck, "can twist me round her little finger."

"Are you going to ride Banbury?"

"No ; my mates can't spare Banbury ; he's busy carting wash-dirt."

The sun was within an hour of setting, and a beautifully cool breeze had sprung up when we started on our journey. As we passed the Bendigo police encampment, we saw Mr. Richard Potter mounted on horseback, looking wonderfully brisk for a man who had passed the previous night bound hand and foot in a mining-shaft. He saluted us cordially.

"Going up to town for the Christmas holidays—eh, mates?" he cried. "I wish you joy. I'm off to the Murrumbidgee to-morrow, to look for a job as hutkeeper, worse luck !"

"I don't fancy that feller," observed Mr. Skilbeck, when we were out of hearing. "If he was going hutkeeping, he wouldn't be mounted on a trooper's horse. In my opinion he runs with the hare and keeps with the hounds—half

thief and half thief-catcher—you understand me? Did you take notice how Muzzler growled at him?"

We made a prosperous journey as far as the Carambong Creek, without meeting with a single adventure. We were hospitably received by Mrs. Skilbeck, who killed a couple of young cocks and made a pumpkin-pie for our especial entertainment. We had not tasted such a luxurious dinner for months, and we presented her with a handsome nugget, to be worn as a brooch, in acknowledgment of her kindness. She laughed at the big damper, which Prawle carried strapped on his roll of blankets. "No fear of starving," she said, "whilst that remains."

Prawle replied that we meant to carry it to town, to show the Melbourne folks how we lived on the diggings. At last came the time of parting. We shook hands warmly with Mr. and Mrs. Skilbeck, and even Muzzler gave us a paw all round.

At length we arrived within ten miles of Auriferopolis, as I once heard a schoolmaster call Melbourne. We were quite weary with crossing the naked plains of Keilor; and when we reached a belt of trees, under which there was a waterhole, we all agreed to camp and take supper. It was two in the morning, the sky was cloudless, and a brilliant full moon made everything almost as light as day. We lighted a small fire, and enjoyed a very comfortable repast. Nobody felt inclined to stir after supper; Prawle smoked a pipe, while Jemmy and I rolled ourselves up in our blankets.

"Hallo!" whispered Prawle presently—"Look there!"

Jemmy and I raised our heads, and saw in the extensive plain before us, which shone in the moonlight like a sheet of frosted silver, the figures of two horsemen. They were

not more than a hundred yards from us. A moment afterwards one of them uttered a peculiarly shrill whistle. They were then joined by three other horsemen, who rode out of the wooded region which skirted the plain. The five next drew their horses' heads into a circle, apparently consulting together.

"Who are they, Prawle?" I asked—"Constables?"

"I'm afraid not," he answered. "Diana's foresters, more likely."

After holding council together for a few minutes, the horsemen dispersed and rode away. We felt immensely relieved. But our relief only lasted for a few minutes. To our horror we presently saw them converging on us from all quarters of the compass!

Two of the number rode in advance of the others, presenting their revolvers at our heads and bidding us hold up our hands, with dreadful threats of vengeance in case of disobedience.

Suddenly one of them uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"Why, it's only a parcel of boys!" he exclaimed. "You swore it was Clarkson's lot, Barney."

"Sure it was Clarkson's lot that we saw at the Wombat," answered Barney. "Didn't they gev us the slip by starting off before daylight?"

We understood what these ruffians were talking of. Clarkson and his mates were reckoned the luckiest diggers on Bendigo. During the last few weeks they had obtained upwards of five thousand pounds' worth of gold.

"Boys or men," cried another of the robbers with an oath, "they must have something worth taking." He dis-

mounted from his horse, and swaggering up to us, roared out, "Turn out your pockets."

"And hand over your blankets and hats," said Barney's companion. "If you try to keep anything back, we'll strip you and flog you with a bullock-whip."

As I recognized in Barney Callaghan a member of the Maconochie gang, I ventured to hand him the safe-conduct which I had received from his captain.

"Hwhat's this?" he shouted roughly. "This ain't a bank flimsy. Here, Ned, you're a scholar—read this."

Ned read it aloud. It was received with shouts of brutal laughter.

"Captain Maconochie be jiggered!" exclaimed the Irishman. "This is a free country. I'll call no man master as long as I'm outside of Wintle's Hotel.* Ned, lerd us a lucifer. I'll light my pipe with Mac's note of hand."

He suited the action to the word. As Prawle afterwards remarked, it was unkind of him to destroy the pass, for even if it had no practical value, it would have been highly prized by collectors of autographic curiosities.

By this time we three unfortunates had emptied our pockets, had unrolled our blankets, and had handed over to our oppressors all the gold which we had not "planted" in our precious damper. Prawle, as the biggest and strongest of the company, delivered over three ounces, while Jemmy and I were content to surrender about two ounces each.

"Is this all?" growled Ned.

The Melbourne Gaol, at that time under the control of Mr. Wintle, was so styled in slang phraseology.

"You can search us again if you don't believe us," said Jemmy.

They had searched us pretty well already—they had plunged their hands into our pockets, they had felt us all over, they had rummaged in our blankets and our pannikins, they had torn out the lining of our hats.

Prawle did something which Jemmy and I thought decidedly too rash. With a countenance expressive of the utmost humility, he handed over to Barney, the Irishman, the damper—the precious damper which contained our joint fortunes.

"Curse your bread!" he answered, "I don't want it." He gave it a kick with his foot. It broke into two or three pieces; but, most fortunately, they rolled beneath a log of wood, and lay in a deep shadow.

"Now, then, pack up your traps and be off," said Ned. "Dare to say a word to the police, and we'll shoot every one of you." With these words he remounted his horse.

You may conceive with what apparent carelessness and real anxiety we picked up the fragments of the broken damper, and thrust them into our pockets. A corner of the great nugget was actually laid bare, glittering and yellow, at the point of fracture!

We packed up in such a state of agitation, that we left several things on the ground behind us—a pannikin, for instance, and a tomahawk. But having secured the chief part of our property, we cared little about the rest. Till we got into the streets of Melbourne, which we did not care to enter till day was breaking, we scarcely spoke a word.

We went to Mrs. Clutterbuck's boarding-house, but

found every corner of the house engaged. Shoals of immigrants were pouring in, and the town was full of diggers, holiday-making. Ten o'clock found us at the doors of the Bank of Australasia.

We were the first customers there. The clerks were accustomed, in those days, to strange doings, but even they were amused to see us gravely breaking a great loaf of unleavened bread to pieces, and picking out its golden plums. We were as pleased as lucky Hans in the old German story to get rid of those worrying lumps of gold.

We had been so accustomed to greater troubles, that we thought it but a small annoyance when we went to Messrs. Pickford's Baggage Warehouse, and found that an extensive burglary had been perpetrated there during our absence, that our boxes had been broken open, and that all our best clothes and other valuables had disappeared.

The proprietor showed us a heap of coats lying higgledy-piggledy on the dirty floor, and invited us to fit ourselves from them; but, as we were rich, we preferred going to a reach-me-down store, as Prawle styled it, where a Jewish gentleman rigged us out in the latest slop fashions.

Late in the evening of that day, at a suburban village called Brighton, on the borders of Hobson's Bay, we managed to get lodgings. We actually obtained a little room with three beds in it, all to ourselves, for thirty shillings a week.

I must tell the rest of my adventures very briefly. We had encountered plenty of hot winds in the bush, but we had never witnessed a genuine Melbourne dust-storm. The air was as dark and thick as it is during a November fog in London. We literally lost Prawle on Prince's Bridge, though he was close to us, and had to "cooey" for

him. The floors of the houses were strewed a quarter of an inch deep with fine sand, and the heat was intolerable.

(Then I might tell you how we went out duck-shooting in the swamps near Melbourne, and killed nothing but a crane ; how we found a solitary settler there who refused to trouble his head about gold-digging, and sold us delicious water-melons for sixpence each ; how we went oyster-fishing in the bay ; and how, on Christmas Day, we had a delightful bathe. Sharks were said to abound, but we saw none.

We shouted with pleasure on finding ourselves in the bracing sea-water, and chased each other like so many dolphins. Then we went to the Post-office for our letters. My people were all well, but my father was sorely pressed for want of money ; so I sent him all my winnings, except fifty pounds. Jemmy did the same for his widowed mother. And how did Prawle act ? Listen to his parental letter ; it began quite savagely :—

“How dare you run away, sir, from your duty ? If I were not past sixty, sir, I would fetch you back, and rope’s-end you.”

But it wound up to quite a different tune :—

“P.S.—My dear Jack, I have just found out that M’Gaffney is a scoundrel. Maybe you did well to leave him. If you succeed at the diggings, send some gold to your poor old father,

“PETER PRAWLE.”

“What shall you do, Prawle ?” we asked.

“Send the old Turk a hundred pounds.”

Soon after we returned to the diggings ; but our luck had deserted us, and we got very little gold. My mother was

delighted to hear of my success, but both she and Mrs. Wallington implored their sons to come home: so Jemmy and I set sail together, and reached old England safely. Prawle stayed behind.

Years have passed away. Clara Ainslie has become Clara Scudamore; we have three children; and if you were to see me hurrying up Chancery Lane in my wig and gown, you would scarcely believe I had ever been a gold-digger. As for my companions, Captain Spanswick got a berth in the mounted police, Señor Robinson returned to Mexico, Tom Harvey is a clerk in a Yorkshire woollen factory, Mr. Skillbeck has a flourishing farm near Ballarat. And what of Prawle? Why, only last week I got a letter announcing his marriage, and enclosing his business card: "JOHN PRAWLE & CO., AUCTIONEERS AND LAND AGENTS, Scudamore Street, New Greenwich." The dear old boy persuaded the Government surveyors to name the street out of affection for me! And so farewell.



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